SURFING LIFE

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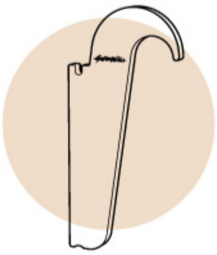

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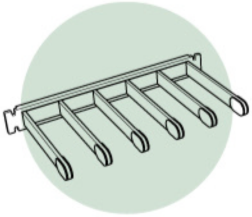

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ISSUE 366: **AUTUMN**

SURFER: **MAX KEARNEY**
PHOTO: **JOHNSON**

Jingeri Jimbelung **[Hello, my friends]. This is the language of the Kombumerri people, one of the Yugambeh-speaking clans on the Gold Coast, who have been connected to this coastline since the beginning of time.**

Welcome to our new quarterly publication with **SIX** pillars in **EVERY** edition: *Travel, Boards, Culture, Waves, Technique*, and *Surfers* ... Brimming with stunning imagery and top-tier storytelling, as well as surfing's historical "Moments" and exclusive SL "Sections", we are bigger, thicker, longer and still unapologetically infecting the world with Aussie surf culture.

Autumn, a favourite season for east coast surfers, when the ocean's still warm from summer's gaze. The "dawn patrol" locks in their glassy expression session before the nine-to-five grind begins. Humid days beckon afternoon storms to cool the sand beneath our soles, and we hope tomorrow's forecast brings offshore winds and swell that stretches to the cloudless skies.

Heavy rains of *guwangbil* merge into *gahgil*—two of the six seasons recognised by the Gold Coast's traditional custodians. Like many Indigenous Australians, Kombumerri people use ecological indicators (not dates on calendars) to determine the shifting of seasons. The sun's heat fades, matching the light-yellow flowers of the *wudjuru* (the broadleaf paperbark), which signals the mullet migration. Dolphins seem more prevalent and active, an ancient link from the *Dreaming*—the gathering and sharing of mullet. As the days shorten, so does the amount of rain and the option of surfing without wetsuits.

We are linked to the *jagun* (land), *borrogura* (sea), and *ngorung* (sky). "Connected to Country" means growing this knowledge, predicting weather patterns and respecting nature's supremacy. All races, genders, sizes, shapes, and surfing abilities can be confident in connecting to Country, if we carry respect. Respecting the ocean and our capabilities means valuing our fellow surfers (by not putting their lives in danger).

In a split-second, surfers can shift from powerful to panicked. A strong stance—feet gripping the board—manoeuvres over an aquarium-glassed wall. The thunderous roar of the ocean ignites our primal fear. Ego recoils. A slow realisation spreads through us while we tumble in the ocean's spin cycle—breathless. We're a speck of sand shifting on its murky bank, a moment in humanity's history. Gulping in air, that lungful of life produces gratitude. And we paddle out again—fatigued, yet fulfilled. From March 'til May, there's a sense of "awe" in autumn.

Lystra Rose, editor-in-chief,
and the SL crew

Lystra is a Guugu Yimithirr, Birri Gubba, Erub (Torres Strait Islander) woman with Scottish ancestry who lives on the lands of the Yugambeh-speaking peoples (Gold Coast). Following cultural protocols, Lystra has been given permission by Traditional Custodians, including Elders, to use and share Yugambeh language and Kombumerri knowledge here.

SURFING LIFE

AUTUMN

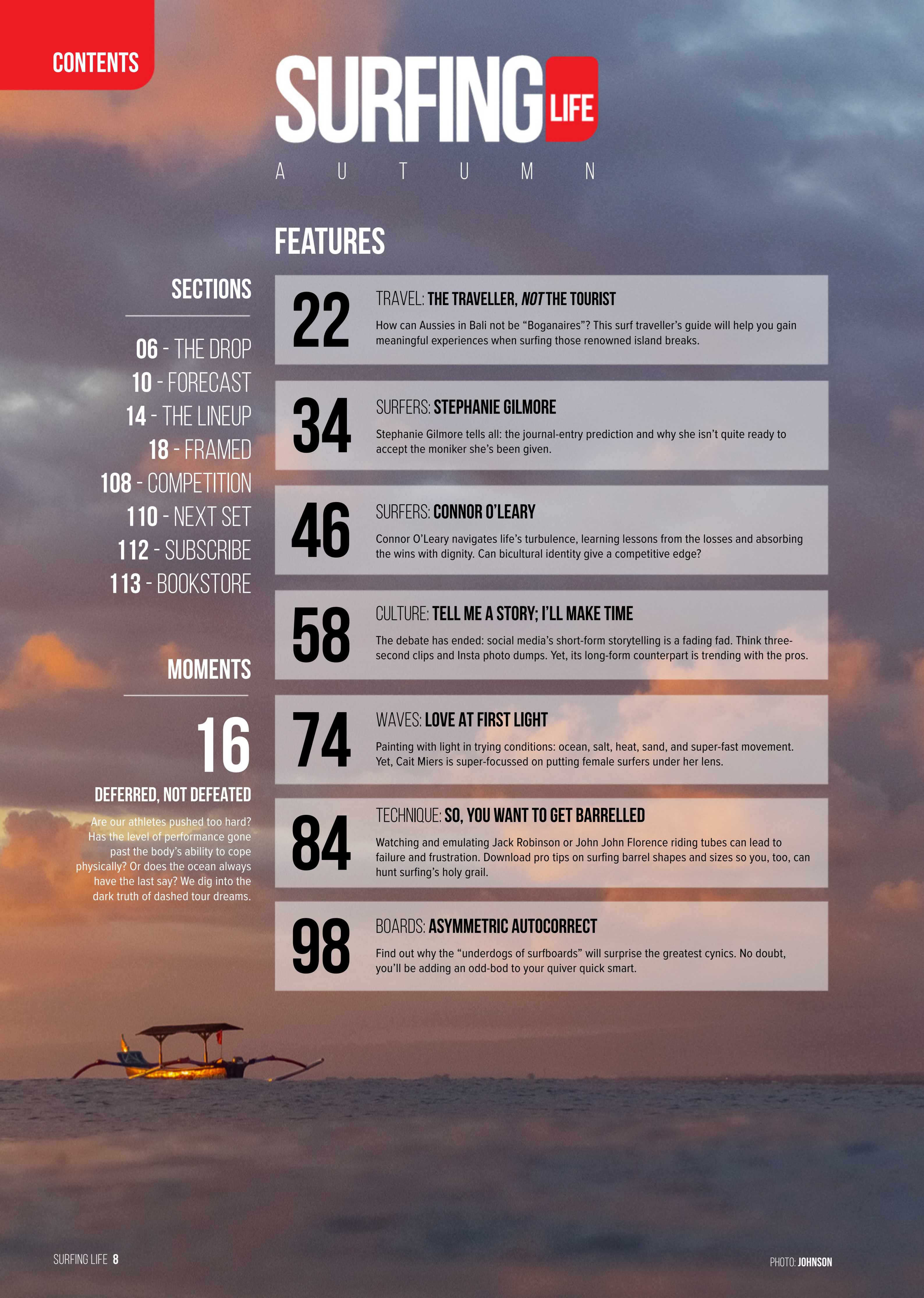

PHOTO: **JOHNSON**

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Find out why the "underdogs of surfboards" will surprise the greatest cynics. No doubt, you'll be adding an odd-bod to your quiver quick smart.

ABRAHAM ROAD

RETROSPECTIVE EVOLUTIONS

WITH KATE WILCOMES

Our global ocean community brims with unexpected characters. Sometimes, they're famous. Most times, they're more knowledgeable than us. Ofttimes, they glimpse into what's coming: lines on surfing's horizon. Forecast predicts a future event or trend; we yarn with Surfing Australia's National High-Performance Director Kate Wilcomes as she peers into the distance.

Is the face of professional surfing about to change?
Great question. The mid-season cut being introduced has significantly changed the qualification process, so that definitely adds an element of change. Only five events at the start of the year determining the cut place a different emphasis on different skill sets to other years, which had an impact on who needed to requalify through the 'CS. In saying that, we have some familiar Aussie WT faces already requalified, so the start of 2023 might not look too different to 2022.

Is there more or less room for new professional surfers to join the ranks?
With the introduction of the mid-year cut, you'd have to say there's more room for new professionals to join the WT.

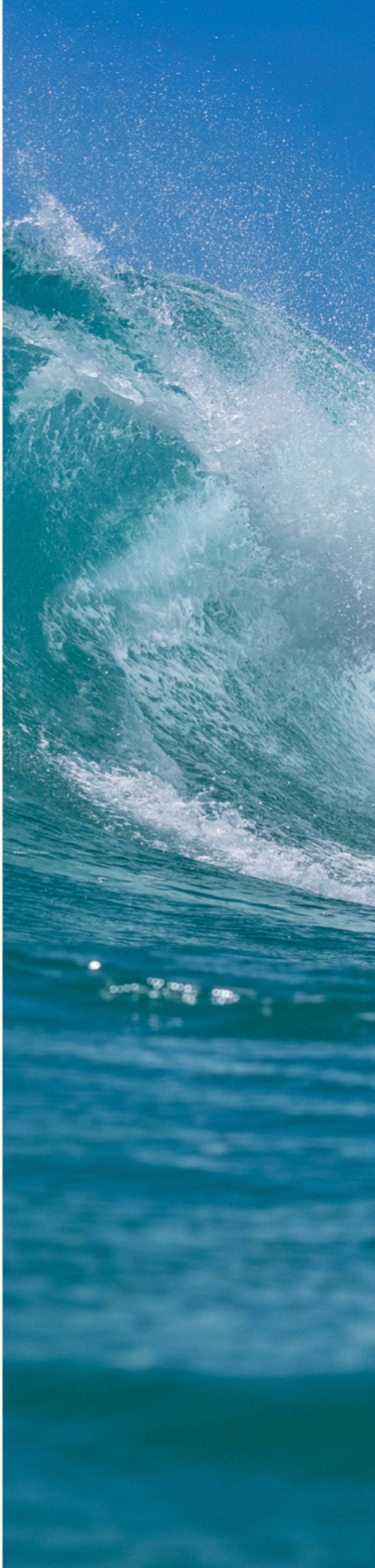
Are the pathways to professional surfing simple and easy or a little tricky to navigate?
The competitive pathway to the WT is quite clear for surfers to follow. The trickiest time to navigate the pathway is during the "Pro Junior" and "Regional Qualification" years prior to making the Challenger Series. It can be tricky to know when the timing is right to start regional events based on their development and individual needs, so having some good advice to find the right balance is key to navigating that period of the pathway.

What does it take to be a professional surfer?
It has always taken skill, drive, and resilience. That's a given; however, now more than ever, you need to be highly skilled in all areas of your surfing and in all conditions. A good support crew is important too. There's a lot to navigate and a lot of demands coming from many different angles. Balancing that and coming back to your focus is easier if you have people you trust in your corner: support and passion. If you truly love what you do and the highs and lows that come with it, you find a way to make it happen!

Is Australia looking strong for the future?
It sure is. We have a lot of talented surfers coming through the ranks from TID (talent identification) through to the 'CS, plus there's another wave of state-level surfers pushing the next wave of talent. There's great support and energy around them, and the depth of skills is impressive.

Three Aussies in the Final Five last year. Was this a good result?
We were all very proud seeing Jack, Steph, and Ethan in the finals, and Steph clinching the title was incredible. How could that *not* be good? Ethan and Jack were right there for a title, so they would have liked to go that step further and join Steph. We also had another few Aussies close to making that Final Five, so four or five in the finals in 2023 would be great, and the talent is there to make it happen.

Would you like to see women's numbers equal men's on tour?
Yes, of course! That would be the ideal goal and one I believe could best happen incrementally. The depth of women's surfing is expanding every year. The Challenger Series is a great gauge for its readiness to expand, and I am sure Jessi [Miley-Dyer] and the WSL monitor that every year, and they would also need to balance that with event logistics.



Macy Callaghan is back on tour. Such a talent shouldn't have been relegated. Time to make the women's 'CT numbers equal.
PHOTO: **SHIELD**

JACK ROBINSON

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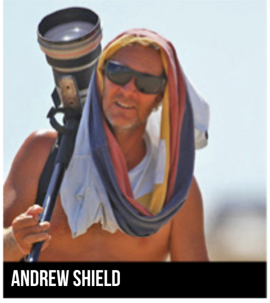
THE LINEUP

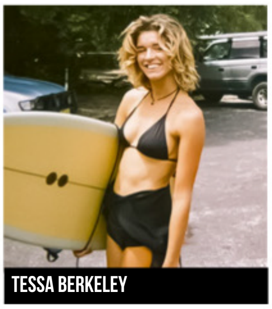
QUESTION: WHICH SURFER DO YOU WISH HAD WON A WORLD TITLE?



ANDREW SHIELD

I wish Taj Burrow had won a world title. I'd have a lot more faith in competitive surfing as a means to determine who is the best surfer if he had won one. His surfing in videos was always incredible. I was fortunate enough to watch his surfing firsthand at places like Hawai'i and P-Pass to attest to his ability to charge big waves.

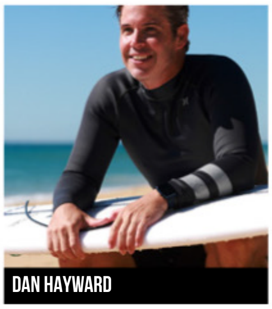
As a keen observer of freesurfing sessions but someone who is fairly ignorant about competitive surfing, I can only assume it was consistency, hassling tactics or ruthlessness (or something else that shouldn't really have a place in surfing) that let him down.



TESSA BERKELEY

Of her 14 years on tour, Sally Fitzgibbons has finished the year in the top five 11 times yet has yet to hold onto the coveted number one spot. I would love to see Sally win a world title. She has been runner-up three times and a consistent title contender who has played a pivotal role in accelerating the progression of women's professional surfing.

Fitzgibbons is extremely hardworking and an incredible athlete. She definitely deserves to clench the world title trophy, finally.



DAN HAYWARD

As someone that calls Coolum home, it would be borderline treason not to nominate Jules (Julian Wilson). He went super close in 2018 and has always had the mix of innovation and brass balls I think is required to be a world champ. Never say never, but he looks pretty happy semi-retired.

If I can throw in a second, again, on the "Sunny Coast" theme, how about Kong (Gary Elkerton)? If he'd won the big show, imagine the stories!

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ON THE COVER:

The frozen figures of Avalon "Bruvs" Fraser Dovell and Letty Mortensen traipse across Russia's midwinter wilderness in search of icy tubes.

Filmmakers Spencer Frost and Guy Williment capture their journey in their epic surf flick *The Corner of the Earth – Kamchatka.*

COVER SHOT BY GUY WILLIMENT

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Surfing Life magazine acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the *chagun* (earth) and *yarrabum* (waves of sea) on which we work and play. We pay respect to the traditional families of the Yugambeh language region of South East Queensland, including the Kombumerri, Mununjali, Wangerriburra and others, and their Elders past and present. We also acknowledge all Traditional Custodians of the land and waters throughout Australia (and the world) and pay respects to them, their cultures, and their Elders past and present. The words *chagun* and *yarrabum* are spoken in the Gold Coast region's Yugambeh language.

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SURFING LIFE

DEFERRED, NOT DEFEATED

After battling to make the tour, it ends before it begins

WORDS BY **RAY BISSCHOP**

Imagine working for years, starting from being a promising grommet to qualifying for the World Tour. You finally make it, and then in the time it takes for Pipeline to thunder and spit, it's all over. Are our athletes being pushed too hard, and has the level of performance gone past the body's ability to cope physically, or is it simply the ocean has the last say?

Two athletes immediately come to mind when we think of this situation: Liam O'Brien (LOB) and Sophie McCulloch. At the beginning of 2022, Liam paddles out at the world's most perfect barrelling wave.

"I was surfing out at Pipe in the morning of the first day of the event, just warming up, and I couldn't really get a wave," LOB says. "So, I was sort of trying to get in, and I got a little double-up that wasn't that menacing at all. I took off—was riding along it on my backhand, and then I think a backwash must have gone through the wave. It all happened pretty quickly. The backwash sort of lifted me off the board a little bit, and my back foot flipped over, so my toes were facing down when I remade contact with the board. Then as my foot flipped over, the wave just clamped all the energy, pressed the board up into my feet, and then had me pushed back down on the board as well. So, my foot pretty much bent the wrong way to the point my toes nearly touched my calf muscle."

The Gold Coast local felt three clicks in his ankle—the sound of his rookie year ending before it began. "I knew straight away," Liam notes, "and sure enough, I broke the bottom of my fibular and tore my syndesmosis ligament as well, which they call a Weber B fracture."

Sophie wasn't surfing a wave of consequence like Pipe. It was a small day out at Snapper [27 December, 2022], and the backwash caught the Sunny Coast visitor.

"When I did it, I thought, *Aw, that doesn't feel great*, and then immediately after, I was like, 'Nah, this isn't happening! Not now. There's no way this is happening'," Soph says, her voice fills with disbelief.

"I sort of paddled back out, wiggled my ankle around and was like, 'It actually feels fine'," she explains. "I tried to surf another wave, and it didn't feel great after that, and I kinda just thought, *Ah, I'll go in, and I'll rest it—probably just a sprain.*"

At the time, Sophie's friend suggests calling a physio from Surfing Aus.

"I thought, *It's probably just a sprain. I don't want to make a big deal of it if it's nothing*, and they [her friends] were like, 'No, you're calling the physio.' So I called the physio and kinda got advice to just stay off it and get an MRI just to be safe."

She reflects further. "The next day, I think at that point in time, my body—my mind was just telling my ankle: *It's not sore. It's not sore*. And, so, I was definitely in a bit of denial for the first 24 hours or so."

Liam and Sophie were caught by innocuous waves—backwash—a lesson or reminder for the rest of us. Yet, their injury's pain pales into insignificance when compared to the mental anguish suffered, especially after labouring so long to qualify.

When asked how he immediately felt, Liam replies, "Disbelief, probably first of all. I think it was a bit of sequence of emotions. Yeah, shock and disbelief to begin with. Just having done the injury, the timing of it, of course. And, then, I suppose, just devastation afterwards when it all sunk in, and I realised I wasn't going to be in the contest, and I had to watch it. It was absolutely cooking."

With her more-recent injury and tour dream slipping through her fingers, Sophie responds fittingly. "I suppose my first reaction was definitely, *Yeah, not happy*. I wanted to cry but to keep it together as well," she admits with a sigh. "So, yeah, I managed. I was in really good company at the time, so I managed to sort of keep it together and have a good night regardless. But, yeah, that night going to sleep, it was more like disbelief: *Is this even real? Is this happening? It can't be real!*"

How much stress is too much? Pro surfers' contracts hinge on results and performances, not to mention bonuses built on rankings.

Thankfully, Liam has completely recovered and qualified again for the world tour. Would he have preferred the injury wildcard? Definitely, but Liam, to his admission, believes it was a good road.

"I would have preferred to surf the tour," he agrees. "I qualified for it. But with that said, I think I did learn a lot going through rehabilitation. It taught me to be a lot more disciplined with my training. I was already training but certainly not to the degree I do now because of the injury."

Is this some overzealous positive mindset or something more profound—that butterfly-struggling-out-of-a-cocoon awareness?

"I think just going through the entire process of making it to the tour and seeing what it takes gives you an insight into the level that is required. Having another year to process that and work towards where I needed to be at the tour level probably helped me as well," LOB says with genuine humility. "I might hopefully be a bit more prepared this time than I was last time."

Aussies love to back an underdog, and competitive surfing dishes out inspiring comeback stories. But is there something we can do as a sport to avoid these injuries? There's no formula yet.

"I think it's just the nature of the sport," Soph suggests, "because you find a lot of these injuries aren't actually happening within competition. I suppose you know the schedule is really demanding, but I think regardless, even if competitions didn't exist, we'd still be seeing athletes get these injuries for sure."

Although it's heartbreaking watching some of our favourite surfers battle for years to qualify for the big show, and an injury prevents them from entering the arena in their well-earned rookie garb, it's what makes our sport so riveting and unpredictable. When we paddle out, we know there's a chance a rogue wave can catch us unaware. We accept the ocean is in control, and we are often at the mercy of Mother Nature. But we do it anyway, and so do the athletes we love and admire. So, here's to Liam's first year on tour and Sophie's quick recovery and return to the top league. And to all the other athletes aiming for and surfing in the Championship Tour, we wish you all the best with any injury you may incur.

Liam O'Brien turns his injury
setback into a glorious comeback.
PHOTO: **SHIELD**

Alister Reginato launches his vertical take-off. Viewed from behind, Reggie is eight foot in the air, but it's a helluva drop further to his LZ.

Photographer: **Dan Hayward**
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THE TRAVELLER, *NOT* THE TOURIST

Localising, the art of a Balinese adventure

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY **TRAVIS JOHNSON**

Nearly every Aussie surfer has the memory of a Bali surf trip tucked away in the vault of his or her conscious mind. Since the '70s, Australians have been making the pilgrimage to the Island of the Gods for their spiritual surf nirvana. That quiet contemplation sitting atop a sun-kissed sea after a day of pumping waves, watching the afternoon slowly melt into the horizon under a blood-orange sky. Or a Bintang in hand, perched atop the cliffs of Uluwatu. Arms are aching, a lime-infused body missing bark from the reef below. The rash to end all rashes spreads across the torso, for although you'd surfed the better part of eight hours, it was just too good to go in. You're waiting on a Nasi Goreng from a ramshackle warung. You're exhausted but oh so satisfied. The only thought coursing through your brain is the view right in front of you, and you can't help but think, *Does life get any better than this?*

THE SEARCH
rip curl

Bali has lots of friendly locals with all sorts of vehicles. The crew jump on a long boat, heading to an outside reef. PHOTO: **BISSCHOP**

O'NEILL

Many surfers connect spiritually to the waves and the places they visit. Respectful of the fragility of Mother Nature and the beats and hums of local life, we envelop ourselves in the culture of the land. Far from bending native life to the whims and fancies of our customs, we localise and modify as best we can. We seek to find a home wherever we go. Herein lays the art of travel. To strip back the infinite complications of our Western world and find refuge in the simplicity of a foreign way of life.

However, there's an uglier side to the Bali experience. The decay of Australian behaviour in Bali in recent decades has been well-documented. So-called "Boganaires" have been taking full advantage of cheap flights and cheaper beers to challenge the ideals of the easy-going Aussie. The booze-filled antics of—a small but loud percentage of—holidaymakers have given rise to the "ugly Australian" moniker, often abusing the warm, generous nature of the Balinese people. Too polite to tell the drunken Aussie to "Bugger off!", the Balinese often take the abuse of out-of-control tourists with deferential ease and good humour, adding to the invincibility of the inebriated.

Though Australians on tour in Bali may have picked up a reputation, surf culture in general seems more inclined to pay our due respects. Kobie Enright has been to Bali eight times. Most recently as part of *Surfing Life*'s trip in August last year. She has seen the lengths Australian surfers have gone to assimilate with the Balinese people.

"I think the surf community, in general, respects the community and environment a bit more," Kobie says. "No matter where you go in the world, within the surf community, it feels like a little slice of home, so we want to respect and engage the local community, its food, and lifestyle as much as possible."

"BEGINNING OF THE END."

In his three trips, Thomas Carvalho has fallen in love with Bali and believes that Australian surfers seem to embrace local life. However, he acknowledges the yin and yang of our behaviour. "From my experience, Australians generally seem to behave well. In saying that, I have witnessed people disrespecting the Balinese culture and taking advantage of the people's friendliness," he says. "It's hard to judge at a national level because individuals are so unique regardless of nationality. Some have respect to hold their values and beliefs to themselves, while others think they have the right to force their ethics onto people of a completely different culture."

Though they no doubt have encountered their fair share of "ugly Australians", Thomas marvels at the Balinese people's friendly disposition. "Welcoming people from all over the globe must be exhausting, but they do so with such incredible warmth and open-mindedness."

Although an increasing awareness of our surroundings has led to a more enlightened surf community, our patronage of the island has not been without cost. Decades of Australian money pouring into local economies have made irrevocable Western-influenced changes to Bali's culture, environment, and financial system. So, how can we fit into the Balinese way of life in the least intrusive manner when enjoying the island's smorgasbord of quality waves? How can we be a traveller and not a tourist?

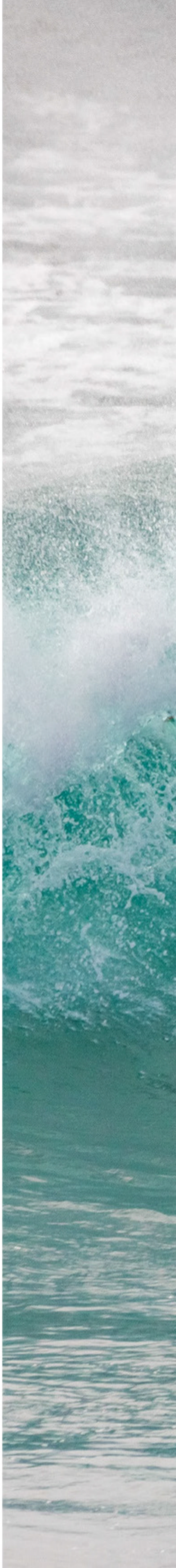
Eons ago, in the infancy of the Aussie crusades across the Indian Ocean, the austere Western adventures that discovered the waves of Bali did not have the luxury of plush accommodation and air-conditioned minivans. With an archaic road and transport system, and no immediate access to many of the breaks they sought, early surf adventurers had to navigate the unknown, including jungle, farmland, cliffs, and the occasional poisonous snake, using only a finely tuned sense of direction more akin to orienteering than tourism. The only thing missing was a compass, although, on the outer reaches of the Indonesian archipelago, you'd probably find them on a boat using one of these too. They had to immerse themselves in local life, eat the food, learn the language, sleep on the same wafer-thin mattresses and delve into the customs of the Balinese if they had any chance of finding what they came for. They were true travellers.

Although, now, one of the most visited spots in Bali before 1980, Uluwatu was accessible only to those willing to hike for it. "I used to love walking in along the track—this narrow goat track—with cactus either side and stiles you had to climb over," says Stephen Palmer in the book *Bali: Heaven and Hell.*[1] "There was bush all the way between Legian and Kuta."

These halcyon days of living off the smell of an oily rag, chewing betel nut with the locals, and teaching each other their language and culture seem centuries ago despite only 50 years passing since the first wave of Australian surfers landed. The classic 1972 film *Morning of the Earth* brought Uluwatu to the Western world's attention. Then in 1980, Bali hosted its first international pro surfing contest, the OM Bali Pro, on the Bukit Peninsula. After the first event's success, a road was built to the break,[2] and another brick was placed in the burgeoning Bali surf tourism wall.

Phil Jarratt, author of *Bali: Heaven and Hell*, laments the role surfers played in the changes tourism wrought on the island. "There are jaded old surf adventurers in Bali who date the 'beginning of the end' of surfing's golden era on the Bukit to the building of that road and the subsequent bridge to Padang Padang," he says. "The Suharto-led development push on the peninsula was already on the drawing board, and nothing was going to stop it. It was just a shame that the surfers had to open the door."[2] Soon, the floodgates would open, and by the end of the '80s, everything had changed.

These days the cultural and environmental changes seem almost irreversible unless the tourists suddenly leave, which did happen during the global pandemic of 2020–2021. And here is the conundrum. Surf tourism has been a driving force in the reliance of foreign money on local economies. You only need to talk to a cab driver in Kuta to realise the devastating effect the pandemic had on the work lives of the denizens of Bali. On *Surfing Life*'s August 2022 trip, a cab driver thanked the travelling crew almost tearfully for their patronage of his country. The previous year, with no tourist trade, he had been forced back into Third World conditions on his family's rural farm.



Though Bali is riddled with waves, the trick is knowing where they are and when they work best, which is why we use a local surf guide.

A "traveller" enjoys a steep learning curve, even if it's the path to Uluwatu.

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GOLD COAST

KSILVER

So the locals are stuck in a vicious cycle. The Westerners arrive and change the landscape with their tourist dollar, but the economic effect on families is catastrophic when they leave. During the entire year of 2021, there were only 51 visits by foreign tourists to Bali, representing a 99.95% drop off compared to pre-COVID levels, according to the Central Statistics Bureau. In October 2021, the occupancy rate for hotels in Kuta was 17.73%. The breakeven occupancy rate is 40%.[3] With the tourism trade in dire straits, money flow to street-level vendors was non-existent. As the pandemic eased and international travel re-opened, Australians trickled back into Bali. This boost to the economy was welcomed with open arms, but had we already reached a nadir in Bali concerning the damage our presence had created? With our return, how can the surf community begin to give back to the people who have given so much to us while in pursuit of our pleasure? Can we return to the roots of the early adventurers and truly become more the traveller?

The *Surfing Life* Bali Board Bible marked Ellie Brooks' tenth trip to this land of never-ending waves. On those trips, she's seen both the good and the bad side of the tourism industry. "I would say us Aussies don't get the best wrap," says Ellie, although she does note the differences in the surf community. "The Australian surfing community differs from the general Australian. We understand the culture and are there to hunt waves and surf all day. We respect the ocean and the environment we are surrounded by. We want to share their stoke, not create havoc."

In her first trip back to the island post-pandemic, the impact our absence had was apparent in the most simple of exchanges. "I bought a few trinkets from a little stall and let her keep the change. The lady [at the stall] wouldn't stop hugging me. She was in tears. She was just so grateful someone bought from her store. She told me it had almost been two years since she had seen a tourist and someone had bought from her. For me, it was probably 20 cents Australian that I gave her, but she appreciated that."

> "SO RESPECT THEM AND APPRECIATE THEM."

Helping ease the financial burden the Balinese face and getting back on their feet is one thing, but what about helping maintain that unique character of the local people, instead of using our privilege to bend it towards Western tastes? According to Ellie, learning a few of the basics and taking the time to have an in-depth conversation with the locals can open doors to a more wholesome experience. "I believe the Balinese love having us in their country. Being respectful and giving them a little time goes a long way. Try your best to understand their culture and even learn how to say, *please*, *thank you*, and *hello*," she recommends. "They are all rather welcoming, so when you're open to the more cultural side of things, you can see how loving they can be."

Thomas spends much of his time out of the water bantering with the locals and asking questions, regardless of whether he understands the language. "The best way for travellers to engage with the local people is through language. Try your best to practise it with the people. All my conversation attempts with locals have resulted in me learning new words," he says. "The Balinese seem to love spreading their culture. They're always stoked teaching some Bahasa Indonesian or their own village's language."

Kobie agrees that getting out of your comfort zone is the first step in engaging the local community. "Get out there! Talk to them, and eat at the small local warungs. I promise you; it will be the best food in Bali! Ask questions. They love to talk to you and engage when given the opportunity."

One of the positive changes in surf tourism, at least for the convenience-addicted Westerner, has been the advent of surf tours. Ellie highly recommends going down this route. "I think travelling with guides is a great idea. It's convenient, and with their knowledge, you're going to find good waves."

Kobie also loves the idea of hiring guides for a Bali surf trip. "We were so lucky to have the opportunity to have the guides. They have so much knowledge and are just happy to be out surfing with you," she says. "They are often taking you to waves [where] only locals go. They call you into the waves that locals would be on. So respect them and appreciate them." Kobie is quick to point out that although on the trip of a lifetime, we must also realise we are encroaching on someone else's abode. "The guides are there to make your experience the best it can be, but in saying that, you are also in their home. Treat them like a friend or family—not a guide, because that is how they see you."

Thomas agrees with this sentiment. "It's hard to leave pumping waves, but the surf guides aren't on vacation. It's their job, and they have homes to get back to. And make sure you treat them to something along the way that they like. Be it a coffee, snacks, or listening to their music."

Although not roughing it (like the early Australians in Bali), being willing to experience the Balinese way of life with the locals or your guides, can infuse the tour with a deeper sense of connection and meaning. Thomas sees the guides as another way to experience a more authentic Bali. "Get to know them. Everyone has a story to be told, and you might learn something for your own life from their story."

This intimate relationship, built over days and weeks, is something Ellie also cherished. "When we had our surf guides, all of us made an effort to let them enjoy surfing too. We'd call them into waves, share our breakfast with them, take photos with them, and just treat them like we would each other. It was hard to say goodbye to them!"

By avoiding the tourist traps catered to our Western tastes, engaging with the servers, street vendors, and anyone else you encounter (even if it is using limited Bahasa Indonesia), submerging yourself into the local warungs for some authentic Balinese food, and showing respectful deference to those who grew up there, your Bali experience may become about more than just good waves.

"I think the Australian tourist sometimes misses the inner beauty of Bali and their culture. It's just so easy to go straight into Zen mode and stay in one part of town," says Kobie.

"Surfers seem to seek a deeper understanding of the Balinese culture, environment, and people," Thomas adds. "I guess the ocean is a place of union for all types of people. Maybe it's a higher power that overbears any cultural or ethical difference between us."

In that union between person and place, is where we find the essence of travel. When we lose ourselves in the way of a land so different from our own, we can find spiritual enlightenment and connectivity through the generosity and welcoming of others. Momentarily, we find a new home. That is the spirit of becoming the traveller, *not* the tourist.

Notes:

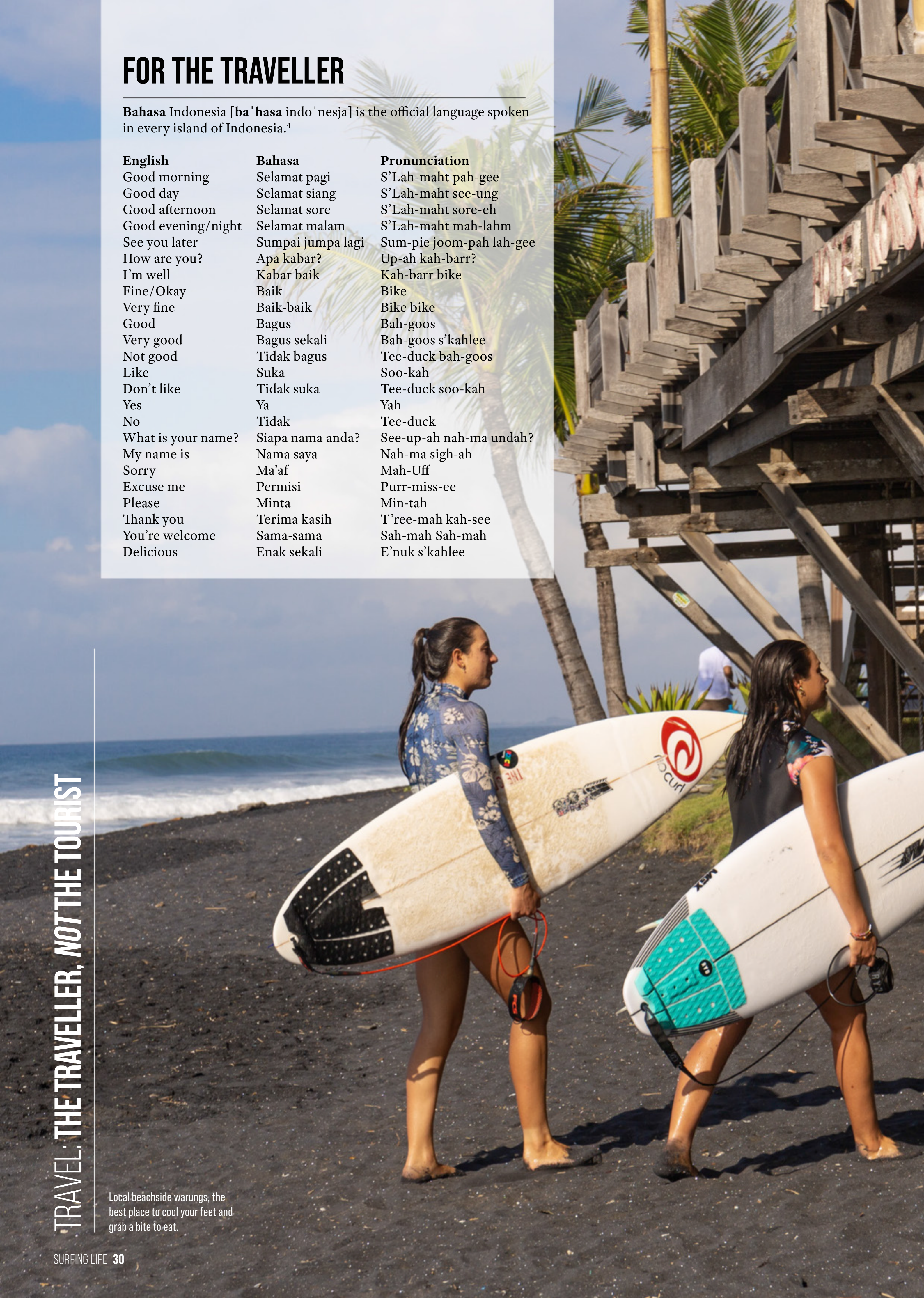
1. Jarratt, Phil. *Bali: Heaven and Hell.* Melbourne, Hardie Grant Books, October 2014.
2. Topsfield, Jewel. (2015, December 30). 'Waves of change ad degradation: How surf tourism dumped on Bali and Indonesia'. *Sydney Morning Herald.* Retrieved January 13, 2023, from https://www.smh.com.au/world/waves-of-change-and-degradation-how-surf-tourism-dumped-on-bali-and-indonesia-20151230-glwtzi.html
3. Muhajir, Anton. (2022, February 28). 'Rising and falling in Bali during the pandemic'. *Inside Indonesia.* Retrieved January 13, 2023, from https://www.insideindonesia.org/rising-and-falling-in-bali-during-the-pandemic
4. Neely, P, *Indo Surf & Lingo: The #1 Guidebook to Surfing Indonesia*, Peter Neely; 25th Anniversary edition, 2016.

East or West Coast, you won't be disappointed; Bali's packed with lefts and rights.

FOR THE TRAVELLER

Bahasa Indonesia [**ba**ˈ**hasa** indoˈnesja] is the official language spoken in every island of Indonesia.[4]

English	Bahasa	Pronunciation
Good morning	Selamat pagi	S'Lah-maht pah-gee
Good day	Selamat siang	S'Lah-maht see-ung
Good afternoon	Selamat sore	S'Lah-maht sore-eh
Good evening/night	Selamat malam	S'Lah-maht mah-lahm
See you later	Sumpai jumpa lagi	Sum-pie joom-pah lah-gee
How are you?	Apa kabar?	Up-ah kah-barr?
I'm well	Kabar baik	Kah-barr bike
Fine/Okay	Baik	Bike
Very fine	Baik-baik	Bike bike
Good	Bagus	Bah-goos
Very good	Bagus sekali	Bah-goos s'kahlee
Not good	Tidak bagus	Tee-duck bah-goos
Like	Suka	Soo-kah
Don't like	Tidak suka	Tee-duck soo-kah
Yes	Ya	Yah
No	Tidak	Tee-duck
What is your name?	Siapa nama anda?	See-up-ah nah-ma undah?
My name is	Nama saya	Nah-ma sigh-ah
Sorry	Ma'af	Mah-Uff
Excuse me	Permisi	Purr-miss-ee
Please	Minta	Min-tah
Thank you	Terima kasih	T'ree-mah kah-see
You're welcome	Sama-sama	Sah-mah Sah-mah
Delicious	Enak sekali	E'nuk s'kahlee



Local beachside warungs, the best place to cool your feet and grab a bite to eat.

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LOCAS
Warung
Bali everyday is sunday

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Kobie Enright, galloping along
Racetracks, Uluwatu.

sue the boy

Messy Rings In Precious Metals

Rings, Pendants, Necklaces,
Bracelets & Personalised Designs

925 Sterling Silver/9ct Yellow gold.
suetheboy.com | @sue_the_boy

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Steph Gilmore manifests the moment

WORDS BY **KATE McMAHON**

This one feels different.
I'm so excited for this opportunity.
I'm nervous as hell, but I'm gonna
win the world title tomorrow.

Stephanie Gilmore stares at the three short sentences scribbled across the page. It was the last entry in her journal the night before the 2022 WSL World Title Finals Day. Then, at the time of writing, it was a manifestation of how she hoped it to be. To re-read those words several weeks later from the comfort of her Coolangatta home, knowing the outcome, the journey it took to get there and not knowing what the heck happens next, Stephanie's skin prickles at the profundity and boldness of her claim.

"In the past, I've had that kind of confidence before, but I've never wanted to vocalise it," she says as she settles in for our interview.

Her return home to the Gold Coast as the most successful female surfer in history after her eighth world title win, while being full of celebrations and champagne, has been humbling.

"I was doing an interview at the Rainbow Surf Club the other day and was like, *Wow, this has come full circle*," she says.

There's perhaps no other building as monumental in Stephanie's surfing story as this. Nestled on the shore between Snapper Rocks and Rainbow Bay, it's home to Stephanie's club, Snapper Rocks Boardriders, and is less than 500 metres from her first purchased unit and the luxurious apartment upgrade, both perched on D'bah Hill.

"I was having flashbacks to the first time I won that event at Snapper as a wildcard at 17 years of age. And I feel like that was the defining moment for me, like, *Okay, this is what I want to do with my life. And I know I can do it now*," she says.

The world always looks brighter from behind a smile—EIGHT times brighter!
PHOTO: **MIERS**

That event was the 2005 Gold Coast Roxy Pro. The roar from the shoulder-to-shoulder crowd on the Rainbow Bay Surf Club's VIP deck was deafening during every one of Stephanie's heats, with an obvious bias for the local teenager. Skipping school to slip into a competition vest as a wildcard, Stephanie defeated two world champions, Sofia Mulánovich and Layne Beachley, and then beat Hawai'i's Megan Abubo in the final. That was the moment that changed everything. Like a perfectly executed slingshot, the win catapulted Stephanie into her surfing career. She signed a lucrative five-year deal with Rip Curl, continued her wildcard domination in 2006 by surfing through the trials at the Havaianas Beachley Classic to reach the final and, again, defeat Layne Beachley (at her namesake event, no less), and won the 2007 WSL World Title in her rookie year.

We know what happened next is beyond comprehension, and it's certainly not lost on Stephanie. Being back, burrowing her toes into the sand of her home beach, Stephanie is comforted to know not much has changed.

"It was just a nice feeling to know that you can go and achieve success in all parts of the world and feel like you've achieved greatness, but at the end of the day, you know, we're still just going surfing. I have a lot of great energy from people, and everyone is excited that it's happened. [But] the way that people [are] celebrating me is respectful," she says.

It's no exaggeration that Stephanie is a celebrity. Mainstream magazine covers, 700k+ Instagram followers, bus-back advertising, talk show appearances ... So it's comforting to know that she's still afforded personal space to do what she loves best.

"It's a nice feeling like nothing's really changed. And I love that people feel like I'm still just myself [even though] I have this drive to succeed and do awesome things with it. But I can still just go down the beach here at Snapper Rocks, and people aren't over the top. It's a nice acknowledgement, like, 'Hey, congratulations, that was amazing. Stoked, I got to see it,' and we get on with our lives," she says.

Stephanie has orchestrated respectful boundaries, and the public shares her view that she's the down-to-earth person she perceives herself to be. Her perception is a reality, allowing her to live her best life. A glimpse into the Gilmore household leaves little wonder that it helped shape the human she is today. Stephanie describes her mother, Tracy, and father, Jeff, as "the coolest parents ever" and expresses her immense gratitude for how supportive and thoughtful they are. The frothing surf dad and more-sensible school teacher mum complemented each other in raising their three daughters, Bonnie, Whitney and Stephanie. And while love was ever present, Stephanie explains their love language was more acts of service than words of affirmation.

"We never really spoke the words 'I love you' to my parents, and for them to say that to us was always weird," she says, laughing. "They showed us love through their actions. Giving up their Saturdays and Sundays to drive us to hockey, touch football, Little Athletics, nippers ... [But] they were just chill, like they were never forcing me to compete," she says. "Mum and Dad were a great team [raising] us girls. They instilled values in us that we're to be grateful for [what] you have even if it isn't much, to respect the people around you, and be active and healthy and have fun. They're the values I still use and go right into my competitive career."

Stephanie's domination of competitive surfing started at an early age: local comps, state and national titles. From age 12, it was almost expected she would grace every first-place podium while her opponents scrapped it out for second, third, and fourth.

"THE SMILING ASSASSIN."

"I loved it. I loved the trophy and the little prize bag you get after it. Like, winning at the Gromfest and the All Girls Surf Showdown, they were my highlights because I got this big goodie bag full of things my parents probably never would've bought me," she says, laughing again. "It also felt so natural to me to be dominant, and I was so competitive in every area of my life," she adds.

Yet, surprisingly, despite repeatedly wielding her winningness, albeit with her trademark smile, Stephanie rarely experienced vitriol or overt jealousy from her competitors. No vicious rivalry, trash talk, feuds or soap-swapped-for-wax sabotage. Perhaps, even if oblivious to it, that was one of the secret weapons that carried her through eight world titles. "The smiling assassin" as the WSL commentators often remarked.

Going through adolescence, particularly in a female-identifying vessel, is tricky enough to navigate in the privacy of your own world, let alone in the surfing spotlight. Imagine dealing with a developing body exposed in tight or minimal surfing attire, the shifting hormonal cycles affecting performance, and being in the public eye while experimenting with romance and relationships. Yet, Stephanie admits she started that journey with a blissful unawareness.

"I mean, I was such a tomboy; I didn't care about how I looked. It wasn't until I got sponsored [that] I was like, I guess I have to look like something or tick certain boxes of being a stereotypical surf girl. Yeah, there was always a bit of unease there. Because I wasn't like the pretty surfer girl. But at the same time, I knew deep down that dedicating my life to my craft was more important than how I looked," she says.

Stephanie believes that the rise of online exposure has undoubtedly changed the game. All teens had to worry about during Stephanie's coming-of-age era—the early 2000s—was what their auto-play Myspace song would be. Now, a digital presence is a daily grind that risks diluting what's actually important.

"I'm so grateful that when I was a grom going through those teenage years, we didn't have social media. And I feel for the young kids these days. They don't even know each other, and they're competing against each other so hard for who can release the next best content clip, feeling like you constantly have to curate your brand image. It's so young. It blows me away. It's like, *Whoa—just be a kid and go surfing and enjoy it*. And, you know, if you want to be on the tour, and have a long, great career, that will come; just take your time," she says before adding a call to those at the wheel of responsibility. "I hope the parents of these kids can help guide them through it and not push it. Just let them understand that working on their craft is what's most important. Whether it's captured on film or not, it doesn't matter."

Stephanie fondly reflects on her life stripped back to simplicity: "I remember being at school, me and my friend Ashley Smith. You know, just the surf-rats. And we were [all] hairy legs, boardshorts, hair in a wet bun or ponytail all day because I never wanted to do anything [with it]. I just wanted to get to school and get it over with, so I could get home and go surfing. And thinking about moments where, you know, everyone was stressing about how they looked, what party they were going to go to, and which boy they wanted to be with. And then the big decision of what they were going to study in school. I just remember thinking, *I'm so lucky that I feel comfortable in my own skin. And that might not be the best-looking skin, but I'll take it because I know what my body can do*," she says, also noting how grateful she was to know beyond a doubt that professional surfing was the path she wanted to follow.

Steph's smooth style is complemented by her radical approach.
PHOTO: **JOHNSON**

Laser focus. Flawless flair.
PHOTO: **SHIELD**

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PHOTO BY **MARK COWLES**

IGNACIO SALAZAR
WORLD CLASS BIG WAVE SURFER

3.6m
SWELL HEIGHT

“It’s pumping out there!”

Get live surf conditions at a glance.

The Weret smartwatch shows real-time weather forecasts powered by magicseaweed, the most accurate weather conditions for surfers, covering 3,000 beaches in 180 countries. It tracks tide, wind, temperature, barometer, swell height and more.

Available in 6 different models.

POWERED BY
msw magicseaweed

COMPANION APP AVAILABLE ON
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Despite self-image not playing a lead role in guiding Stephanie's intentions, in 2010, she arrived at a fork in the road where the future of her personal brand would inform an important decision. Her Rip Curl contract was up for renewal. A ten-year partnership and four world titles within a five-year deal had certainly given the surf company behemoth bang for its buck. Still, although fun for a teenager, perhaps the celebratory "Happy Gilmore" campaign had run its course. After an in-depth consultation with her sister-slash-manager, Whitney, the Gilmores decided it was time for something new to allow Stephanie an opportunity to grow into her next career phase. A choice not taken lightly.

"[Rip Curl] supported me as a junior, and they saw the talent in me from a young age. I can't thank them enough for [giving] me that support and wanting to ignite my mission into my world surfing career. But, yeah, it just sort of came to the point where Whitney, my sister, could see something more out there. And she wanted to see how this could pan out, and she wanted to help me blossom a bit more," she says.

Quiksilver had released a women's range (Quiksilver Women's), a step up from the more teenaged Roxy girl, and sponsored females in the arts, fashion and more. Stephanie was enticed by what could be offered for her performance in the water and inspired by what possibilities lay on the land.

"[It was] kind of like for the tomboy growing up into the badass sister of the Quiksilver guys," Stephanie explains.

Things felt right and key moments aligned that led Stephanie to take a leap of faith and sign a five-year deal with Quiksilver.

"Sometimes in your life, you just know that this is the moment you need to change something—shake it up. I was ready to blossom into something different," she says, "and Rip Curl wasn't ready to move with me on that mission."

The next sponsorship decision didn't go quite as smoothly, and Stephanie's desire to showcase a more grown-up version of herself sparked an online uproar. Roxy used their 2013 namesake event in Biàrritz, France, to announce a new addition to their surf team. The short campaign clip was set on a sexily suggestive slow motion with an equally saucy backing track by Flume. It featured a "mysterious" tanned blonde sliding out of bed in just her underwear, sauntering to the shower, driving to the beach, slipping into a competition vest and paddling out into the lineup without catching a wave. There were plenty of close-up bum shots, but the facial identity was concealed. A hashtag posed the question: #whoamijustguess. And the internet melted. Articles were written, tweets tweeted, and petitions posted. On one side of the sandbank stood those relegating the advertisement as poor form, particularly from a surf brand choosing to sexualise surfing over showing the athlete in action. The argument continued that female surfing's progress, still fragile from the misogynistic era profoundly documented in *Girls Can't Surf*,[1] had been set back and that the protagonist should've done better to portray a positive role model. On the other side of the sandbank stood Stephanie Gilmore in disbelief. For those who had watched her over the years, it wasn't difficult to put the pieces of the puzzle together to conclude her as Roxy's mysterious identity—the hair, posture, paddle style, and the board sponsor sticker. Stephanie, usually the one cruising the furthest away from controversy, watched wide-eyed as the backlash blazed. Roxy released the surfing component of the two-part clip shortly after, officially revealing Stephanie as the new team rider, but the flames of furore were too high to douse.

> "THIS IS GONNA HAPPEN, SO MAKE SURE YOU TUNE IN."

Stephanie expresses there was a definite intention to show a confident, more mature and body-positive side of herself than the self-proclaimed tomboy that took her well into her late teens. And although shot in a beautifully artistic way, she concludes it was the right idea but the wrong delivery.

"Looking back now, I think about the stress and drama and all of the madness we were feeling in that time. Like, *Oh, we've just done it all wrong. This is going to be a media nightmare.* They're all moments you learn from, and [these are the] things I try and encourage [for] girls in their careers and the photoshoots they choose to do. It's like, as long as your intentions are right, if you feel comfortable in yourself that you want to take these photos, or you want to film this video or whatever it is, if you feel good about it, then do it. But it's gotta be for the right reasons. It made me realise that if you believe in it, you just have to stick to your guns. It's important to stand up for something you believe in," she says.

Stephanie expresses that this is probably the most controversial circumstance she's been in, then counters with a laugh that it wasn't even that controversial. She's curated a relatively low-key existence to a high-profile A-lister life. No gossip mag front-page scandals, celebrity dating speculation, or party pics taken out of context. Instead, she's particular about what she says *yes* to.

"It's important to ask, 'Does this align with my values? Is this authentic to my brand and what I believe?' I work with my management team—my sister, and Nicky Craig, and Ben Crowe—[to] make sure I tick all boxes before I go ahead. I would say that I've probably said *no* to more things than not because I didn't feel comfortable doing it," she says.

It's clear that Stephanie pays attention to instinct, perhaps never more so than during the 2022 WSL Finals Day. The universe threw her some signs, and she says it was all about eights. The WSL had initially planned to run on September 9, then reassessed the conditions announcing the eighth as a more favourable day. Stephanie jokes she was not complaining about that decision. Going for her eighth world title on September 8, wearing her "88" competition vest (representing her birth year), morally supported by her partner, Harry Henderson, from 88 Surfboards, and two cherry tomatoes even latched onto each other to form the shape of an eight in her salad. Plus, this year felt different, so she did things differently.

"I texted Mum and Dad the night before and said, 'Hey, I'm on first at 8 a.m. I think it's 1 a.m. your time. Make sure you watch.' Like, I never do that. Mum and Dad said afterwards, 'You'd never text, *Make sure you watch.*' That was weird," she says, laughing. "I was like, *This is gonna happen, so make sure you tune in*. Usually, I'm like, *Yeah, whatever*."

Stephanie explains it was like being on auto-pilot with the mission clear in her mind. And not only did she approach things differently, but she learnt from past mistakes. In 2021, she'd entered the Finals Day arena convinced not only that Carissa Moore had already won but that she deserved to win that world title. No coach, using old surfboards, Stephanie's lack of strategy and targeted mindset showed, and she lost the first heat to Johanne Defay.

Steph's late arvo drop
behind her favourite rock.
PHOTO: **JOHNSON**

Despite the 2022 World Title showdown being an equally almost impossible notion—start from fifth place, surf three heats against three other surfers, then match up against a fatigued-free Carissa Moore and win, all to snatch the coveted world title tally crown from Layne Beachley—there was a notable shift in Stephanie's language.

"My internal dialogue was hard on [the notion], *You can do this. Let's make it happen.* And I wasn't *sure* it was possible," she quickly points out, "but I wasn't focusing on that, either. I was like, *I'm gonna focus on the things I can control*."

Stephanie drew on the analogy "you only fall as far as your training" to inform her event preparation to enact how the Finals Day would look. Wake at 5 a.m., drink a smoothie, activate her brain and muscles, go for a quick freesurf, then 30 minutes of intense exercise, 15 minutes recovery, repeat. This was the routine right up until the days leading to the event. That simulation of what the Finals Day could look like revealed something key to weave into her campaign strategy.

"In one of my training sessions, I was super buggered, and I didn't actually do the heat six and thought, *If I want to win this, I'm gonna have to do it in five [heats] because I don't think I've got the stamina to get six*," she says.

On Finals Day, Stephanie entered the event with nervous anticipation but felt centred. "The nerves where your legs feel like jelly, and your arms are heavy—it wasn't like that," she says. "I [was nervous]; nerves are great because it reminds you that you're excited to be there. But I was very connected [in that] flow-state everyone's looking for."

Grit was another key ingredient Stephanie used to rub against her opponents. Earlier that year, she was far from okay with the WSL's decision to run the Pipeline event, the first contest on the calendar and a monumental day in women's surfing history, a day before Stephanie was due to exit COVID quarantine.

"I was really pissed off [at] the WSL for going ahead [with Pipeline]. It set me up for the year to be a bit edgy. And [then] I just made the mid-year cut and just made the Finals cut. I was hanging on by a thread the whole year. I was just existing on tour at this point and [thought], *What is this all for?*" she says. "So, when I got to the finals it was like, *Alright this is it. All or nothing. You have nothing to lose at this point*."

However, at risk of a 2021 carbon copy, Stephanie's fairy-tale finish was almost derailed as early as Heat One. Not only did she frustratingly fall on several of her opening rides, but opponent Brisa Hennessy surfed crisply, pinning Stephanie to the ropes and requiring a 6.40 with 42 seconds to go.

Stephanie explains her inner voice was touting, *You've still got time. You made this mistake last year, don't embarrass yourself,* and she likens her next move to a "lioness moment". Taking off, she kept feet to wax and drew Steph-esque lines scoring a heat-winning 6.83.

"I never underestimated any of my opponents, but I had full confidence in myself. And was able to lean into it and appreciate the moment," she says.

From there, Stephanie removed that near-miss moment from her mindset and zoned in on the intention to drive harder and achieve greatness, with absolute clarity that this was her purpose. She challenged the unthinkable and rode seamlessly to claim her eighth world title. Noting it as "the best win of my career so far", she sealed the moment with a "F--k yeah!" scream during the live broadcast and tears that streamed freely for the world to see.

> "ALRIGHT THIS IS IT. YOU HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE AT THIS POINT."

Once the Steph-a-palooza dancefloor celebrations died, Stephanie headed into the Canadian wilderness for a trip with fellow Yeti brand ambassadors Keith Malloy and Mark Healey. No mobile notifications, media mayhem, or talk of points and record-smashing. Just a lodge on Nootka Island (adjacent to Vancouver Island), cooking what you catch, tuning into sounds that don't require a power point, surrounded by forests on land and kelp forests at sea, and with plenty of time to ponder what the past few months all meant.

"I have this feeling after I've won each world title that there's more to do," she says. "Winning world titles is an incredible feeling, and it's such a cool space to be in when the stars align and you get the trophy, and everyone's celebrating you. You really do feel like a rockstar. But then you take off on a trip like that, out in the wilderness you start to think, *Okay, what is it for? What use is this trophy? What can I do with it?*" she says.

Being nurtured by nature is one of the best ways to reflect on what matters most, and Stephanie allowed herself a moment to realign.

"Out in the wilderness, I think about the fact I need to be more proactive in environmental issues. I want to learn more about different topics," she says, also confessing she's had one foot in, one foot out on many causes that are important to her, simply because her focus has been to become the most successful surfer of all time.

"When you're an athlete, you sort of [have a] one-track mind that you forget about what else is going on. And it's a very selfish world, but when you have success, you have the platform to be able to move into those topics. It's important because you can't be a competitive surfer forever," she says.

But Stephanie's not ready to hang up the 88 vest just yet, confessing she still has goals to achieve before truly accepting the moniker of G.O.A.T.

"I obviously want to win at Pipeline and would love to do better in Tahiti—both places I'm very uncomfortable at, and I need to get better. I have so much room for improvement," she says.

We ask if throwing herself into chunky waves comes from a place of desire or obligation, and she quickly confirms it's desire.

"You know, it's good to finish up and have the trophy and all the accolades, but then to feel like I've got so much more to learn and give and evolve into, it's like, *Whoa, this is cool.* I feel like I've unlocked even more potential. Imagine what I can achieve," she says. "Yeah, it feels like there's a lot more in the tank. Now that I've won my eighth world title, I feel freed up. Like, I can go into these missions unafraid of getting injured. I finally reached the milestone I wanted to," she says.

We'll never tire from seeing Stephanie in the water, whether it's winning eight world titles or trimming along on a twinnie. So an uninhibited, unshackled Stephanie Gilmore going for greater heights? Yes, please.

Notes:

1. *Girls Can't Surf*, 2021 (Australia), Documentary, Screen Australia and Madman Entertainment and A Finch & Pursekey Production, Directed by Christopher Nelius.

With so many long-running rights on her doorstep, is it any wonder Steph has such an exquisite execution?
PHOTO: **SHIELD**

SURFERS: **STEPHANIE GILMORE**

Is eight enough?
PHOTO: **MILLER**

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CONNOR MEANS “LOVER OF HOUNDS”

But on tour, O’Leary ditches the underdog label

WORDS BY **TESSA BERKELEY**
PHOTOS BY **ANDREW SHIELD**

The duality of humanity exemplifies athletes like Connor O’Leary. Calm and competitive, power and flow, humble yet confident ... These oppositional forces harmoniously exist within him. Obvious highs and lows are unavoidable when travelling and competing. As is written in the laws of motion: every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Wins are not experienced without losses. With elation often comes great heartache. O’Leary expertly navigates the turbulence of life as a professional surfer by finding lessons in the losses and absorbing the wins with dignity.

Connor’s formative years were hinged upon the combination of cultures and values. His Japanese mum, a competitive surfer in her own right, bestowed some of her competitiveness onto her son.

“I’ve got her competitive fire in me,” Connor admits. “My dad’s kind of the opposite. He doesn’t do competing and all that very well, but he loves surfing for what it is. I guess I got the best of both worlds.”

Competitive or not, the love of surfing from both his parents drove Connor to confront the waves as a child while growing up in the Sydney suburb of Cronulla. Though Australia remains home for Connor, Japan has always played an important role in his life.

Having recently returned from a trip to Japan for the first time post-pandemic, Connor’s appreciation for his culture was renewed by connecting with the heritage he once denied. O’Leary reflects, “When I was a kid, I spent a lot of my time trying to fit into the Australian culture. I was one of those kids that wasn’t overly confident, so I guess I tried to put the Japanese culture behind me. As I grew older, I realised how cool it is and how fortunate I am to be able to live and breathe two different cultures.”

Such a realisation led Connor to represent both Australia and Japan by donning both flags on his WCT jersey. Embracing the language and culture of Japan became important not only for his own sake but to encourage young surfers to embrace their diversity and feel comfortable upholding their uniqueness. With the world watching, embracing our identities is a powerful move.

Piercing the air with a two-pronged salute, Connor enters the WT's 2023 campaign.

“Being half Japanese and half Australian is something that I’m really proud of, and I just want to represent it as best as I can,” says Connor. “There’s a lot of people that are multicultural these days that should embrace it and not hold back or try and fit in with the world because you are who you are. Embrace the culture that you have been given because it’s a gift.”

While our cultural heritage may be embedded in our identities, other aspects of our psyche shift and change as we develop. In the land where tall poppies are promptly cut down, the “underdog” narrative is never exhausted, a narrative that followed Connor’s rise in his career. Competitors are often deemed more likeable when climbing from below. The underdog is synonymous with humility and overcoming hardship. Thus when they succeed, they present an idealistic image for the average battler.

Despite winning the ’QS in 2016 and being crowned Rookie of the Year in 2017, conversations around Connor gripped onto the idea of him being a dark horse in the race to surfing superstardom. It was a concept he admits he held onto for too long. Talking to Connor, it is immediately evident his persona may have more than a little something to do with it. Undeniably kind and uber-relaxed, it’s easy to understand how the underdog archetype enveloped Connor’s early career. After finishing the 2022 season, ninth in the world, it’s clear those tropes are no longer consistent with one of the world’s best surfers.

“You can’t keep that underdog mentality for too long because—otherwise—you’re just never going to get better, and you’re never going to face those bigger guys and go, ‘Yeah, I can beat you.’ I had that mentality of, *If he does beat me, it’s okay because I’m the underdog*.”

> “YOU’RE ALWAYS LEARNING. EVEN AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL.”

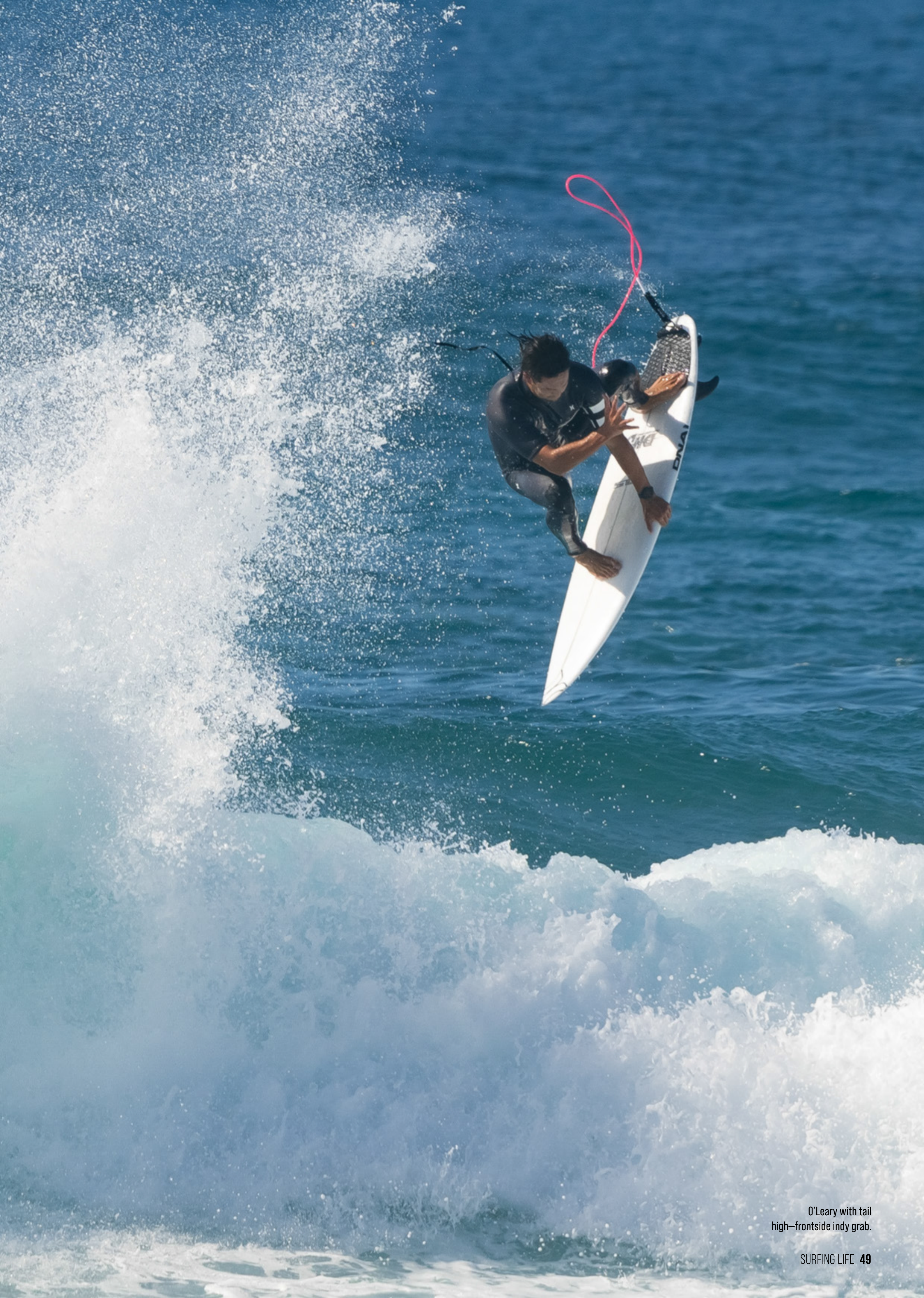
Finding a home in the underdog status may have helped negate the pressure of being at the top. However, the mindset of a champion is free of self-doubt, an inevitable trait of one that views him or herself as the dark horse. “I think it was great for the first few years because I was learning and experiencing it all for the first time. But now that whole era is done for me.”

Being faced with requalification on the ’21 Challenger Series helped O’Leary realise that holding onto expectations was merely a hindrance to his progression. Ditching the attachment to the label, allowed Connor to chase his full potential. “Nowadays, I feel like I can match it with the best, and the underdog status is no more. To be able to say that with confidence is something that is only going to help me. If I hold onto that ‘underdog status’ mentality for too long, it doesn’t help me progress and strive for more.”

Despite the disappointment of falling off the tour, Connor appreciates the valuable teaching moments, which ultimately allowed him to come back stronger than ever. “You’re always learning. Even at the highest level, you’re always learning things about yourself that you wouldn’t have if you were winning,” says O’Leary. A change in surfboards at the beginning of the year was one he took too lightly. “Looking back at it now, it was a really good decision. The transition just took a lot longer than what I initially expected, and that played a lot with my confidence.”

With most ’CT surfers relying on their major sponsors, how tricky is it for pros to navigate tour life without one?

“I was trying to save as much money as I could where I could. I didn’t have a coach last year just because I thought that at the locations, you didn’t really need one. But after falling off and realising what errors I [had] made, I felt like I needed someone there with a second opinion. That’s when I started working with Dog [Richard Marsh], and it was really beneficial to my career.”



O'Leary with tail high—frontside indy grab.

With the complete bag of tricks, Connor is a quintessential modern-day pro.

CORNERS OF THE EARTH

KAMCHATKA

Камчатка

A FILM BY **SPENCER FROST** AND **GUY WILLIMENT** PRODUCED BY **LUKE KNELLER | RHOSA** FEATURING **LETTY MORTENSEN, FRASER DOVELL, ANTON MOROZ**
CINEMATOGRAPHY **SPENCER FROST** EDITED BY **LUCAS VAZQUEZ** ADDITIONAL EDITOR **JORDAN SWIOKLO** ADDITIONAL CINEMATOGRAPHY **MIHA MOROZ, GUY WILLIMENT, ANDREY VISUS, URI MAGNUS**
ORIGINAL SCORE BY **DYLAN MITCHELL FROST** MUSIC BY **DYLAN MITCHELL FROST, THE M1, ROYAL OTIS, FLAVOR CRYSTALS, DANE TAYLOR, RICK SNOWDEN, DECLAN HARSENT**
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Connor discovered that to be among the best, he had to commit fully. "I guess I learned the hard way, but now I know to view it as an investment in myself instead of trying to save some money here and there. Being as committed as I can all the time, win, lose, or draw, is something that I wasn't doing enough of the year I fell off."

The lessons learned were valuable because 2022 was Connor's best season yet! Connor hit his stride at G-Land, narrowly defeated by an in-form Toledo in the semi-finals. A year of consistent results landed him in the top ten. Is preparation Connor's key to landing excellent results?

"It's that whole cliche of 'control the things you can' because, with the ocean, there's so much you can't control," he says. "When I'm not overthinking, that's when I do my best surfing. So I try to tick all the boxes so that when I go away, I'm only working on a few things to prep myself for the event instead of trying to reinvent the wheel."

Pipe can test the greatest surfers. So how did it impact this tall goofy-footer?

"I really enjoyed Pipe [last year]," Connor says, reminiscing about competing at perfect and powerful Pipe. "I think it was the first year for me that it was real Pipe, so to be able to see it and surf it was super surreal."

It's no surprise Connor felt most drawn to the waves that embody the polarities of fear and beauty. "It was a similar vibe with Chopes [Teahupo'o]. It was such beautiful—scary—but beautiful conditions. To be able to win one of those events is something that I feel like I have a chance at and would love to do."

> "I WANT TO WIN AN EVENT. I HAVEN'T WON ONE."

With the perfect cocktail of powerful, drawn-out turns and a ruthless backhand attack, Connor has proven he is not to be underestimated as he finetunes his technique for this year's tour by surfing at his new home of Lennox Head in northern NSW. "I feel like if you're a 'CT surfer, being up here makes more sense because there's a lot of world-class waves that are long. I was so used to surfing short waves in Cronulla. Then, when I would put myself on an open canvas, I'd get a bit overwhelmed because I wouldn't know how to space everything out. I'd be like, 'What do I do with all this time?'"

Continual improvement has become more accessible for Connor at his new local break. "There are so many good surfers around here that I surround myself with. It makes you think and pushes you to try and surf better. To have guys up here like Owen [Wright], Adam Melling, James Wood and Mikey McDonagh, it really helps me to get better."

He sets his sights on this year. "I want to win an event. I haven't won one. I got second one year and a third [in 2021], so I'm just gunning for that number one spot."

The pendulum of tour life, now his weapon. "I just want to keep enjoying myself because life's short," Connor says. "I want to enjoy every experience—good or bad—as learning and just keep plodding along and keep smiling."

Yet, behind the grin of this water warrior we question whether Connor is a happy-go-lucky competitor or if his smile is a warning not to underestimate him.

Fast barrels and long walls, it's no surprise why Connor moved north.

Laying rail, Connor's competitive fire burns blue.

SURFERS: **CONNOR O'LEARY**

One of the most talented goofy-footers on the planet, O'Leary weaponizes "calm".

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TELL ME A STORY; I'LL MAKE TIME

Long-form substance replaces snack-sized content

WORDS BY **STEVE SHEARER**

Steve Jobs released the smartphone on June 29, 2007, and if you are lucky enough, you remember a time before it. The freedom of being disconnected, of being in the *here and now* for hours. Days sometimes. Having that slim little rectangular box connected to the internet 24 hrs a day had one incredible and inarguable result. It fractured our attention spans into tiny pieces, even if doom scrolling for hours. Sure, it's given us a lot of cool things: information you can use to score, endless entertainment, and digital pals all over the globe. You could argue that nothing has changed surfing more than the internet, especially being connected non-stop.

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Letty Mortensen and Fraser Dovell struggle to the chopper with their gear while shooting *Corners of the Earth – Kamchatka*. PHOTO: **WILLIMENT**

With the introduction of technology and the constant bombardment of images and bits of info, everything got shrunk into byte-size pieces. Short, punchy, shareable. Algorithms and search engine optimization favoured what could be shrunk and passed on easily. Kook slams, quick cuts, thirty-second YouTube clips and, of course, the crowning glory for the short attention span was TikTok. Surf culture was gobbled up in this technological maw, and what was spat out was lightweight and skin-deep—YouTube clips measured in minutes or less. Surf magazines, dropping off the perch left, right and centre.

The Global Financial Crisis hit, and with the mass withdrawal in demand, coupled with the rise of the tech giants hoovering up all the ad dollars, the whole surf culture edifice threatened to topple over. Pro surfing almost went the way of the Dodo as the surf industry fell into the toilet, until a Floridian billionaire offered to pick up the tab to keep the lights on. Of course, not that much changed at the grassroots level, apart from our attention spans, which had all been reduced to the size of a gnat.

In short, the short form dominated, or more accurately, our attention spans had been stolen by technology, and that was all we could handle. The prevailing surf media just reflected that harsh reality.

But something has happened, by stealth and almost unnoticed. The video clips have crept back up in length. Books have begun to proliferate. We can sit for an entire day and watch the Eddie without flinching.

For me, Bill Finnegan's memoir *Barbarian Days*, published in 2015, began the shift back to long form. Although the sometimes dry New Yorker prose wasn't always spicy enough for Australian tastes, the book won a Pulitzer Prize in America and began an avalanche of surfing-related titles. *Barbarian Days*' biggest contribution was opening up the playing field for what was considered interesting for both a surfing and general audience. Prior to Finnegan's memoir, the bookshelves in the surfing section were filled with pro-surfer biographies, grand histories, guidebooks, and how-tos. Finnegan's was the first to detail the richness of a non-pro surfer life—one dedicated to chasing waves and living the life with no sponsorship, and thus no compromises, attached. That non-pro perspective—of Hawai'i in the '70s, the glitzy seamy Gold Coast, discovering Tavarua and charging big waves in San Francisco and Madeira—seemed like a bolt from the blue, despite it being a perspective every hardcore surfer could relate to. Finnegan, in retrospect, busted down the door and showed the world our attention spans could handle the long form again.

The year 2015 feels like a lifetime ago. In the interim, we were still watching single-wave GoPro clips at Skeleton Bay and trying to figure out if it was possible to hold your breath for that long in the tube.

> "OUR ATTENTION SPANS HAD BEEN STOLEN BY TECHNOLOGY."

Torren and Ishka astride their trusty steads during the shooting of *Lost Track: New Zealand*. PHOTO: **FOLKWELL**

Last year, Noa Deane dropped *NOZ VID*, a stunning array of kegs and punts.
PHOTO: **SHIELD**

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A larger global event—like the GFC, which enabled the carcasses of the big surf companies to get picked over by venture capitalists—was about to strike.

In January 2020, I had an OS trip booked and paid for. Flights were cheap; it was easy to pick up specials. A good pal visited from the UK in the first week of March, and there was muttering about some bug in China. Less than three weeks later, I was rushing him to the airport with the whole country about to shut borders down the next day. The pro tour was cancelled, and my overseas trip to a Pacific hideaway is still yet to happen.

The closed borders and lockdowns forced us all into hyper-localisation. Fantastic if you were close to surf, especially on the east coast, where La Niña provided non-stop pumping surf. Terrible if you were in Melbourne, which suffered the world's longest lockdowns and not even the Tullamarine wave pool was open to scratch the wave-riding itch. With our options for chasing tubes in the real world shut as planes were grounded, our travel lust had to be lived vicariously.

The feel-good hit of the pandemic—the one that satisfied our frustrated wanderlust—was undoubtedly Ishka Folkwell and Torren Martyn's four-part *Lost Track Atlantic*. The duo had already released a brace of films under the banner of need**essentials**, bringing a return to a meandering, long-form style of filmmaking. Still, it was their trip down the Atlantic Coast from the UK to Sub-Saharan West Africa that was completed just before COVID shut down the world that really shaped the zeitgeist.

Much like *Barbarian Days*, it wasn't a tale of pro surfer excess and fat expense accounts that spiked the collective imagination. The simple things resonated: buying and keeping a crap-box van roadworthy, cooking in the van, tripping out on foreign cultures, making sense of last-minute decisions to chase swells and dealing with all the dramas of travelling in developing countries.

> "*LOST TRACK ATLANTIC* SHOWED THE APPETITE FOR THE LONG FORM WAS BACK."

The friendship between Ishka and Torren laid the backdrop and emotional heft to the films. There's nothing better than sharing peak travel moments with your best mate, but in the end, it was Torren's effortless twin-fin lines on pumping Moroccan Point surf that really got the juices flowing. The boys rolled the dice and scored in the biggest possible way. When the world was constrained, no matter what your thoughts on the virus were, seeing those exotic perfect waves ridden with such style and art brought back feelings that had seemed lost or jaded in the constant technological soup.

Lost Track Atlantic showed the appetite for the long form was back: Four thirty-minute sections and over two hours of filmmaking—released for free. No-one would have contemplated that a decade ago.

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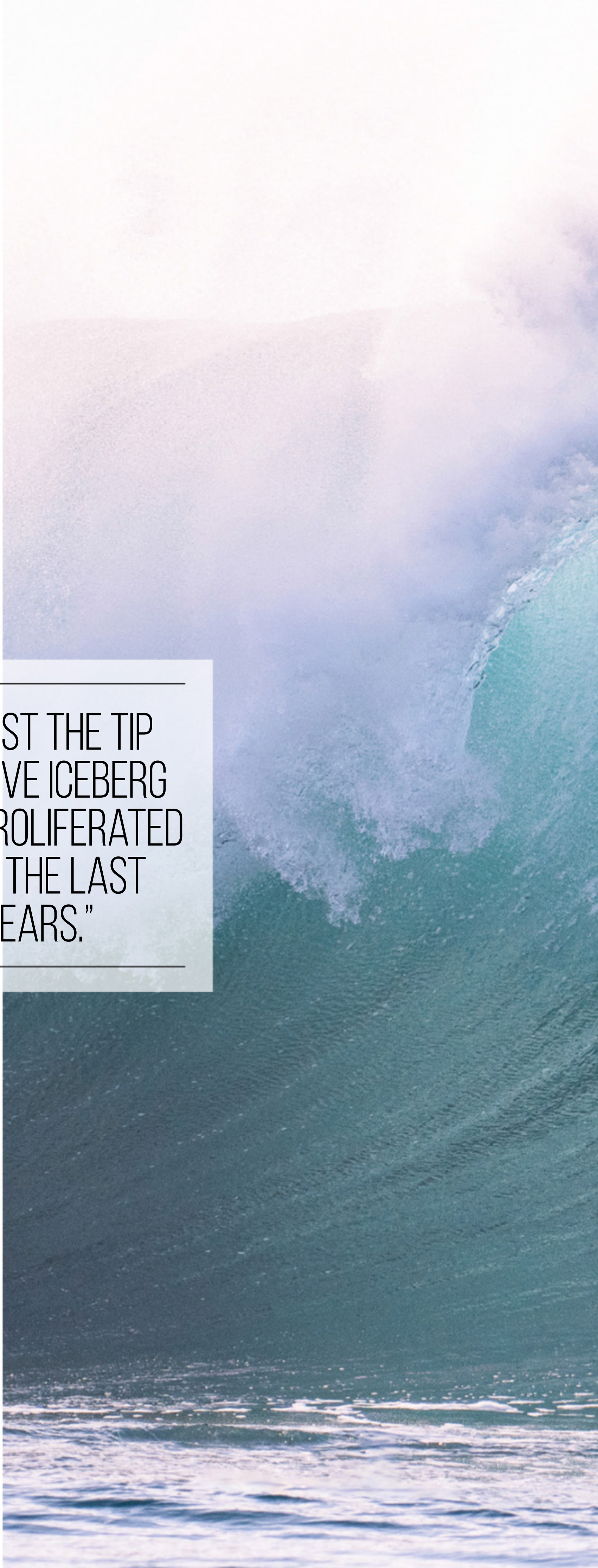
Snowmobiles are normally associated with snowboarding movies, not surf flicks! Welcome to *Corners of the Earth – Kamchatka*, the film that defies clichéd surf stories.
PHOTO: **WILLIMENT**



While the pandemic forced us inwards, creating the space for a deeper appreciation of the longer form, an appetite for longer forms of storytelling had already percolated through the culture.

While surfing didn't invent the podcast, it's hard to imagine a pastime that has embraced it with more enthusiasm.

A decade ago, in 2013, the team of Vaughan "Deadly" Blakey and Jed Smith began podcasting *Ain't That Swell* and are still going strong 200 episodes later. Team Swellian crossed over into live events, weekend retreats, and other gigs, such as showing up at surf comps as a rolling cheer squad.

If the surfing culture at large was heading towards atomised individuals all scrolling their curated social media feeds, the Swellians brought back the concept and reality of the tribe. Even if you're not a joiner, it's hard not to be impressed with what Jed and Deadly have created over the past decade.

In the States, the home of podcasting giants, like Joe Rogan, *Surf Splendor*, and its myriad offshoots, have also been pushing out hour-plus episodes covering every nook and cranny of the surf culture. Board design, comps, comedy with Chas Smith, characters, issues, there's no question you won't find at least an attempted answer to on *Surf Splendor*.

> "THAT'S JUST THE TIP OF A MASSIVE ICEBERG THAT HAS PROLIFERATED WILDLY IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS."

That's just the tip of a massive iceberg that has proliferated wildly in the last five years. Occy was in up to his ears in the *Occ-Cast*. Down in deep, dark Vicco, Jimmy Miles and Cahill Bell-Warren have laid down a heavy body of work with *Lipped*. The Woz has been busy with the Dave Prodan-hosted *The Lineup* podcast, if you can handle the carefully scripted, sanitised content. Even wave pools now have its own dedicated podcast on *Wave Pool Mag* (tip: for true fans only).

What was once short, sharp, and sweet YouTube edits have been transformed by vlogs. Like the podcast, every man and his Hawaiian girlfriend have a vlog in our post-COVID culture. The change from short- to long-form vlogs is perfectly illustrated by vlog pioneer Jamie O'Brien. JOB was the first to really cash in on freesurfer, Hawaiian life with his Red Bull-backed *Who is JOB* series, which began in the ancient times of 2010 with a 7.56 episode. JOB's current episodes, which still run the gamut of surf stunts from Waimea shore-break bashing to surfing huge Pipe on soft tops, now regularly top half an hour. Appetites have changed along with attention spans.

Laura Enever chases big-wave glory captured in the documentary *Undone*.
PHOTO: **SURPLICE**

Long-form clips are how Soli Bailey tells his stories.
PHOTO: **SHIELD**

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Koa Rothman and Nate Florence have picked up the template laid down by JOB and now regularly clock up huge numbers of views for extended vlogs, peeking behind the curtain of what it means to be a professional big-wave guy on the North Shore. Koa's first-person Eddie video racked up 185,000 views. Nate, who missed the event with a broken back, racked up close to 300,000 for his Eddie vlog. The long-form vlog has transformed what it means to be a professional surfer, especially big wavers who no longer have a functional big-wave tour to rely on.

Not just big wavers have created or maintained careers out of long-form vlogs. New Jersey native has built a profile around his transformation from a "drunk" to a "sober" charger ready to surf any novelty wave, no matter how weird or far inland. Despite surfing's inclusion in the Olympics, when you see 'CT surfers with plain white boards due to no sponsorship, there must be a few in the top 34 wondering if they can replicate the gravy formula.

The shift back to long form in the written word, spoken word, and image has been a boon for the surf-obsessed. At the bleeding edge of surf performance, we watch the world's best on live webcast via the WSL platform. That's always been a long-form game for those who have the time or are quick with the toggle finger on the browser when the boss isn't over your shoulder. We used to get the best of the rest in short little clips, but they, too, have embraced a chunkier offering.

Last year's best clip by Noa Deane, *NOZ VID*, clocked in at a healthy 30 minutes and was a surreal and absorbing trip into the heaviest of slabs and loftiest of punts. A single viewing of the entire 30 was essential.

Dane Reynolds may be a little past his prime, but his 45-minute opus *Glad You Scored* dragged us all out of the workaday world (Dane included) into the pure fun of a surf chase with pals. Getting skunked never seemed so entertaining. The final section at a heaving South Sumatran left slab with Dane's piss-take of Insta-influencer narcissism was sheer gold.

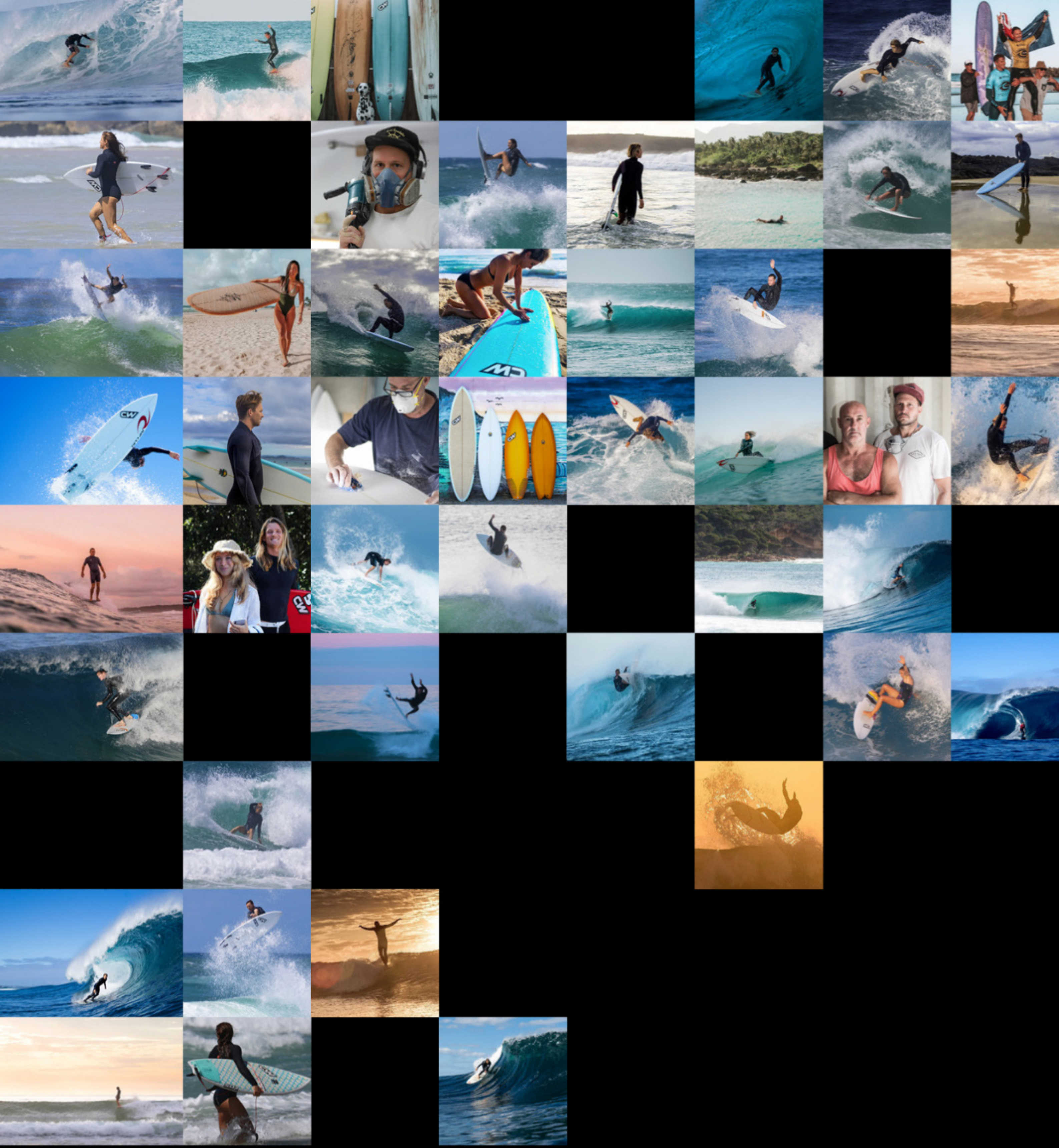
> "SURFING ITSELF HAS NEVER BEEN A SHORT-FORM ACTIVITY."

Surfing itself has never been a short-form activity. Even the thirty-minute lunchtime sesh draws out with the rhythms of the ocean. More often, sessions linger while the grander swings and cycles of tide, wind, and swell draw us closer to what cannot be chopped up and fed to us in technological scraps. The story arc of a single session can be an epic, even moreso a season, a surf trip, a shaper's journey, the evolution of a board design. We're more attuned to the long form, because it mirrors the activity we are devoted to more accurately. As the huge influx of adult beginner surfers who embraced surfing around COVID lockdowns eases, there seems just a little more room to breathe at most lineups. Time and space to embrace the deeper aspects of the activity—whatever that may be. It's a damn fine thing to have those deeper aspects reflected in us by the culture creators we turn to, to keep the stoke alive when we aren't in the water.

Hardly the classic coastal surf trip, *Corners of the Earth – Kamchatka* was shot in some extremely isolated places in Russia.
PHOTO: **WILLIMENT**

CULTURE: **TELL ME A STORY; I'LL MAKE TIME**

Laura Enever charging at Shipsterns Bluff. The film *Undone* chronicles Laura's journey into big-wave surfing, and it's an inspiring ride. PHOTO: **MORGAN**



Clearwater specialise in shaping every style of board. In the new age of surfing when there is a new shaper turning up around every corner, it is good to know you can still find quality craftsmanship. Steve Del Rosso has been shaping for over 30 years and doesn't use a ghostshaper. Steve started shaping in WA where you had to know how to shape a good step-up board and gun, or you'd be left behind. Over a decade ago, Steve made his way to the wave-rich area of the Gold Coast to fine-tune his high-performance shaping. Since then, he has been shaping premium quality surfboards that won't disintegrate after a couple of surfs. If you want to save money, don't buy ten cheap boards. Buy one good one that will last. You'll save hundreds and hundreds of dollars. When you're looking for a new shooter, do yourself a favour, come and find out what makes Clearwater different.

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LOVE AT FIRST LIGHT

Shooter Profile: Cait Miers

INTERVIEW BY **RAY BISSCHOP**

Where were you born, and where did you grow up?
I was born in the 'burbs of Melbourne, a little place called Kew. But when I was about three, Mum and Dad opted for the sea change, so we packed up and made our way down to a little seaside town called Mount Martha on the Mornington Peninsula, Victoria. I was lucky enough to call this place home and grew up here, spending after-school hours down the beach and learning to surf.

When did you start surfing?
Growing up swimming and being around the ocean, I felt that innate pull very early on. During school holidays, we'd jump in the caravan and burn up the coast to Byron Bay, where I learnt to boogie board and then progressed into surfing around age 11 or 12. To be honest, it wasn't exactly love at first sight with surfing—haha. I found it pretty challenging and daunting, but the more I got used to being on the board, the more it felt like something I wanted to keep going with.

When did photography start, and what got you into it?
It's funny 'coz I never ever dreamt that I would be a photographer when I was a kid. I wanted to be an Olympic swimmer—haha. In about Year 11, I started to play around with my mum's camera and would shoot surfers on the rocks at Snapper when we'd head north for holidays. I never thought I could turn that into a career. But I was super connected with sports, so after high school, I actually did a year of a sports science/sports management degree. Halfway through that, I realised it really wasn't for me and couldn't stop looking at the photography degree at RMIT in Melbourne. So, I pulled a super last-minute folio together of my friends skateboarding and chilling down the beach, and I somehow got in! That truly set me on my path, then.

How long have you been shooting?
I started that degree in 2012 and, not long after, discovered my love for shooting women's surfing, so it's about ten years I've been shooting for now.

When did you marry the two?
Around the second year of my degree, I got my first water housing, and I was experimenting shooting friends surfing at home. I definitely fell in love with it then and wanted to tell the story of women surfing through a woman's eye. Embracing elegance, femininity, being yourself, and natural beauty, I was always drawn to those messages, and that was all part of it. I knew in my gut that was the message I would spread through my photography. It's funny when you suddenly link up with what feels right "for you" in life. Everything felt truly aligned, and I was on my path pretty early in life.

Aloof, island vibes capture the "blue hour", which summons surf lovers to escape, dream or scheme.

When did you get your big break in surf photography?
So for our last year in uni, we had to choose a subject and shoot it throughout the year for a big end-of-year show. I chose women's surfing and explored what that means. I was nicknamed "beach girl" at uni because I was the only one living on the coast, commuting on a train for three hours a day to get to the city. I used to dream up my palm-tree-filled, travelling lifestyle on those trains. It gave me a lot of time to think. At the end of that year, I compiled some pretty cool images that eventually turned into "Washed Elegance", which was my first exhibition and coffee table book. I moved to Bali the following year and was asked to shoot the Roxy girls during a campaign trip there. I was beside myself. So bloody excited, and every ounce of what I wanted was coming true. I think that was the real start for me.

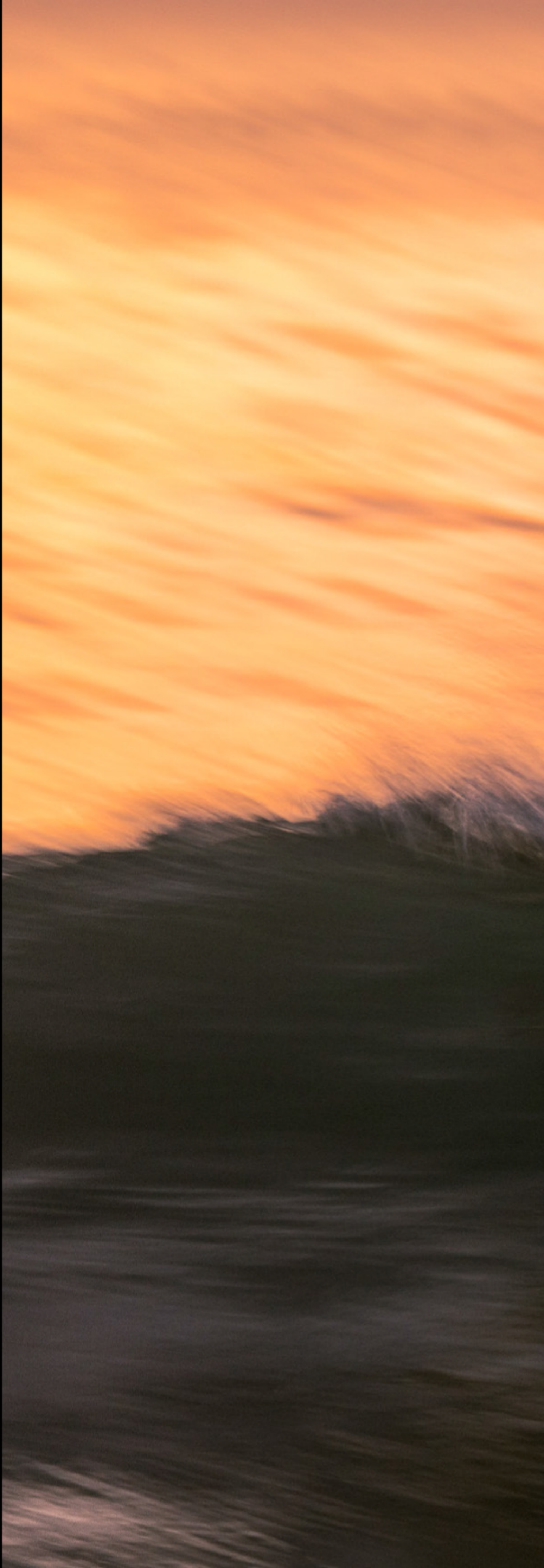
What's the most memorable swell event you've captured?
I got called up to shoot Jaws, in 2019, for WSL on a whim 'coz I was in Hawai'i at the time. I had 24 hrs to get my crap together, find a life jacket, and wrap my brain around the fact that I was about to shoot some of the biggest waves I've ever seen. I spent the whole day on a jet-ski, and after about the first hour, I loved it! It was such an amazing experience. It's funny 'coz I'm not a natural daredevil, but I tend to find myself in these wild experiences from time to time.

Do you chase swell events, or is surf lifestyle more your go?
Yeah, I've never really been a swell chaser, so more surf lifestyle because, for me, I'm more interested in shooting style and grace rather than high performance. I do, however, love seeing perfect lines coming through—haha.

What's the best place in the world to shoot?
I love Sri Lanka. I've had a few amazing trips there and love the beautiful community in some of the coastal towns. I'm really feeling a pull to go to the mountains, though, soon. I'll be doing a Canada and Europe trip in the middle of the year, so I can't wait to see what I stumble upon there.

Did you start as a surf photographer?
Yeah, I was always attracted to the idea of sports photography, as I was such a sports nut when I was a kid. I kinda imagined myself on the sidelines of the athletics carnivals or AFL matches, shooting images. Surf photography was always in the back of my mind, but I didn't think I could make a career out of it until I let my passion and love for it take over and went from there.

Have you ever regretted your decision to follow this career path?
Never. I mean, it's tough running your own business, and there are definitely days when I wish I had a normal job with a normal steady income, etc. But I feel so lucky I've been able to turn a passion into a career, and ultimately for me, it's the message I get to send behind the images that really fulfil me. The message is staying true to yourself, natural beauty, grace and femininity in the water, loving yourself no matter what's on the outside, and having the self-belief to follow your dreams.



Mainei Kinimaka's hypnotic half-light dance: creativity on the wave, matched by creativity with the lens.

Any advice for up-and-coming photogs?
Shoot what you're passionate about. That's where you'll find the most joy, and that's what it's all about. Say "yes" to opportunities and work hard. Be genuine, honest, and stay true to yourself throughout the process. I feel like being successful in photography is honestly 50% talent and 50% personality, how you conduct yourself, interact with others, etc. If you can create connections and have a laugh on set, chances are the brands are going to enjoy your company and ask you to shoot the next campaign. A friend of mine shared something a little while back. In photography, there are three contributing factors. To be successful, you only need two:

Gets things done on time;
Extremely talented; or
A good, relatable person.

How many frames do you estimate you've shot over the years?
Good question! I would honestly have no idea. Ten years' worth of photo shoots. Definitely [been] times when I have gone months without taking a single frame too. Your guess is as good as mine—haha.

Has the art of photography gone with the digital age?
I wouldn't say it's gone—it just changed and evolved. I think that's what some people get annoyed about: How things keep changing, especially in this social media world we live in now. I like to adopt the mindset that change is the only constant in our lives. Everything's always evolving, so I tend to try and embrace it as much as I can. Art will always be created. It's just different approaches to it, I think.

Do you think the shift from film to digital was good?
Yeah, I do. I mean, I think I probably have a more optimistic view on this than others, but as I said, change is always going to happen. Technology will always keep us moving forward, and it is up to us to either embrace it or keep resisting it. The stakes are obviously higher with film, making shots more impressive. Still, I think the change to digital is allowing more creativity because there is more room for experimentation and things like that.

Do you have any favourite surf photographers, and who are they?
I love Ryan Heywood's work. I think he's got a knack for making the most mundane crap look cool. I love photographers that find beauty in the ordinary. I love Ming Nomchong's work. She's always been a big inspiration. It's rad to see anyone who shoots what they love and follows their heart.

Anything on the bucket list to shoot in surfing?
I'm in this interesting time in my life where I feel like I've ticked a lot of boxes of what I'd like to do in the surf industry, so I'm just in the process of mapping out what the next stage looks like. I want to continue shooting surf and progressing and creating work that makes a statement in the industry, and I feel like my idea of "success" has changed, too, which is cool. I was so ambitious in my twenties, and it's paid off, so now I'm like, *Okay, cool. What else do I want?* I just turned 30, and I'm still so keen to keep exploring the world and growing, so I guess we'll just see where that all takes me next.

What makes a good surf photo?
A point of difference. Style. Clean wave. Nice edit. It can't get much better than that!

When the cobalt kaleidoscope
makes everyone's *Jaws* drop.

Wine or beer?
Wine.

Tour or freesurfer?
Freesurfer.

Land camp or boat trip?
Boat trip.

Do you think the learning curve is faster with digital?
Yeah, I'd say so! I guess there are just more tools to help you not screw up the shot! But then again, I'm a Canon user. If you handed me a Nikon or Sony, I'd be back to square one, I reckon!

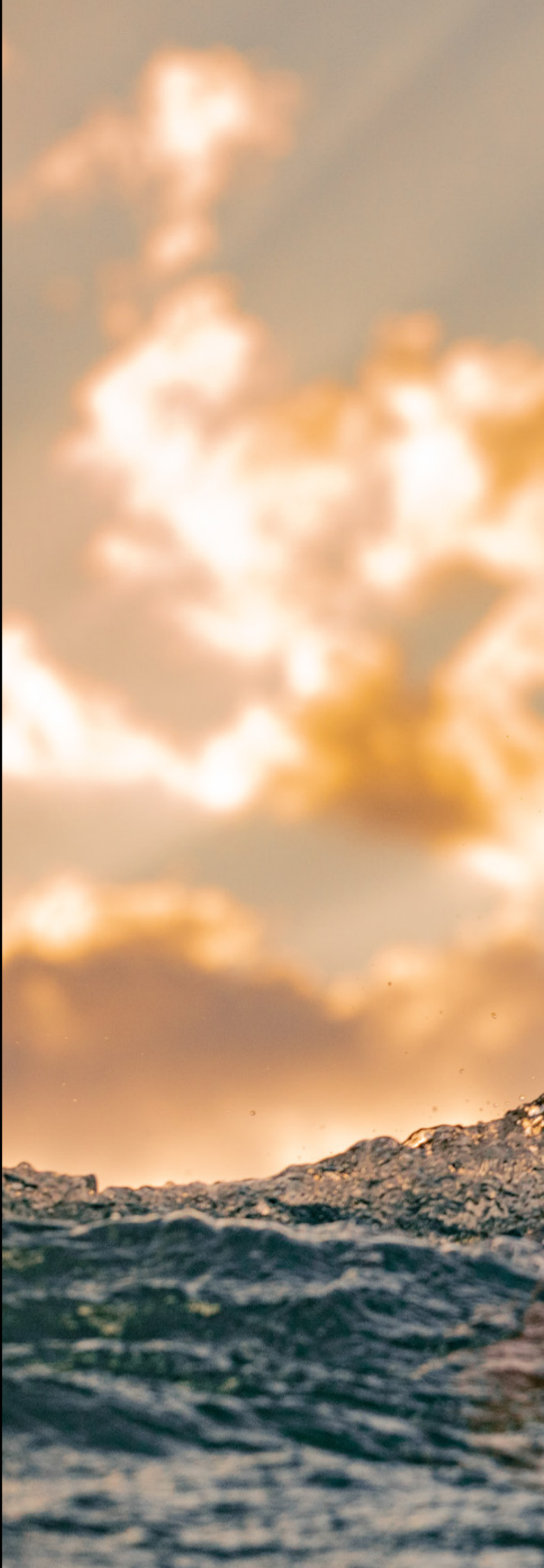
With surf brands and marketing budgets tightening up, have you been able to maintain your status as a professional surf photographer?
Yeah, it's been an interesting world to navigate post-COVID, for sure. Most of us jumped on ScoMo's surf team (JobKeeper) for a little bit, which was just lovely. But yeah, I've definitely seen a shift in the last year or two! I definitely don't make my entire income from surf photography. It's balanced with fashion, lifestyle, weddings and commercial jobs, which I like because it keeps it interesting. It's just about maintaining good relationships with your clients in these challenging times and flowing with whatever comes your way, really.

What has been the most significant change in surf photography for you over the last decade?
Women's representation and voice are becoming so much bigger, and it's truly a beautiful thing to be a part of. When I started shooting in the water in cold old Vicco, I was pretty much the only girl, but I've seen such a change over the years, and it's seriously the best. And it's not because we want to beat, or be like, the boys. It's just allowing women to be more represented, put our spin on things, and be seen in that. To me, it's just about celebrating individuality and equality and bringing feminine energy to the table.

Do you think people are pulling the trigger and dropping things online too quickly these days?
I can't even keep up with my own Instagram these days—haha, so, yes, when people are putting out content and reels all the time, it does make me feel like I need to lift my game a bit. But I had to ask myself a little while ago: *Would you be making reels because you want to or feel you have to?* And I tend to lean more on the "have to" side, which isn't good. So I've chosen only to put stuff out when I feel like it, and when it feels authentic, and I actually want to create it. I definitely don't like doing things because I feel I have to keep up with the trend.

Are you able to make a living from surf photography still without having to supplement it?
Definitely all types of photography, but I would say maybe 50/50 with fashion, travel, weddings, commercial, etc. I shoot all sorts of things, and I'm not too picky. I have a camera; I like to use it—haha. But the passion is still women's surf photography, and I feel it will continue to be like that for a very long time.

Have you won any awards?
I have, actually! In 2014, *Pedestrian TV* had a photography competition running, and I won the sports category and then the overall best photo, which was super special. There was a rad awards night in Sydney, and I was just starting my career, so it was very humbling. I also took a shot of Paige Alms at Jaws, which won "Women's Biggest Paddle" for 2019/2020 at the WSL Big Wave Awards. That was also pretty cool!



Isabella Nichols savours her solitude, paddling through a backlit afterglow.

Do you get your best results from land, water, or air?
Water, I think. I always say to clients, "If you need high-performance shots of surfing where you don't want to miss a wave, I shoot from land. If you want to get creative and don't have an expectation of what you want from the shoot, then I shoot in the water." Water is such a rad angle—still blows my mind every time I'm in there shooting. And the air, well, I crashed a drone once, so probably not my strong point.

What has been the heaviest shooting situation you have been in?
I haven't been in too many actually (touch wood), as believe it or not, I'm a cautious gal that doesn't jump straight in head-first. There's been a few times, though, where I'm like, "Seriously, what am I doing?", and it's been a bit hairy. But, somehow, I always manage to scrape out relatively unscathed. It's kinda funny the whole "risk assessment" thing on shoots. Like, I've been told to scale sketchy cliffs before to get the shot, and the younger me would've been like, *Ahhhh, yeah, sure*. But the older I get, the better I am at standing my ground and actually saying "no" when I don't feel comfortable. It's all a learning process!

What's the most memorable shooting session when everything lines up?
I've had a few of these at Snapper when it's just perfect, calm, storm in the distance, moody light, and it's on! Writing this, I actually realise there probably isn't one super session that comes to mind, so maybe, that's what I'll chase next. But to me, that session is more full of fun, laughs, friends, style, etc. They're the moments you'll cherish forever.

Is it hard as a female shooter in this predominately male field?
Sounds cliché but yeah. Not going to lie, it's been an interesting journey, and I'm still learning how to navigate through. I'm a fairly adaptable character, though, so I find it quite easy to hang out with a bunch of guys, whether at work or having beers, etc. I think the hardest thing is maybe just the respect thing. Sometimes I feel there's a bit of a disconnect between photographers. It's intimidating, for sure. I think photographers and creatives, in general, sometimes adopt this idea that it's all one big competition, and we can't share knowledge, and we're all out there trying to take each other's jobs and things. It's a super competitive industry, absolutely, but I also see so much value in supporting one another and sharing knowledge. That gives me a lot of joy. It's like getting to the top of a mountain and looking around to see no-one with you. If you knock out everyone along the way, who's there to celebrate your wins with you in the end? We're all equals, and we're all just trying to do our thing. I love the idea of an abundance mindset, though, and "there's room for everyone". I'm trying to adopt that more, for sure.

Are you seeing more female shooters?
Absolutely, and it's fabulous! I love when women have hopes and dreams and have the guts to back themselves and go after them, especially in a particularly intimidating environment. It shows real strength and courage. And that's what is happening now—right across—not just the surf industry but society as a whole. Women are finally finding their voice and having the inner self-belief to back themselves and use it, which is beautiful.

Would you be doing anything else?
I don't think so. I know this is what I'm meant to be doing, but who knows what the future holds. There's still a lot I want to do. I want to keep sharing and inspiring women. I think it'll always be in the creative capacity. I love writing and continuing to grow and work on myself. I'm in a time of great change in my life, but it's exciting and as long as I'm still waking up each day excited and fulfilled to create, then I'm doing okay.

A lyrical style of rhythm, flow,
and form, Mia Francis discovers
the end of her ultramarine poem.

SO, YOU WANT TO GET BARRELLED

Six tips for five types of tube rides

WORDS BY **CHRIS COTÉ**
PHOTOS BY **ANDREW SHIELD**

Tube-riding is so easy. All you have to do is watch Jack Robinson or John John Florence do it, then go out and do what they do—problem solved! See you in the water—better yet, see you in the tube!

Well, after watching hours of Robbo and JJF ride tubes, taking meticulous notes, mimicking their movements in the living room, paddling out at the local break, finding the wave, seeing the tube, then the sky and whitewater flashing by while cartwheeling violently over the falls ... That was fun, but it didn't work.

Riding the tube is to enter the liquid vortex, the holy grail of surfing. For some, it's easy, as if they were born with a sixth sense that allows them to travel effortlessly through aquatic caverns. For others (most of us), it's extremely difficult—seemingly impossible. Of course, you need a tube to ride the tube, and the vast majority of surfers around the world rarely see tubes. Then, when they do, they usually panic. It happens to the best of us. But if you apply yourself and do the world to learn this sacred art form, you, too, can ride the tube.

The following list is a brainstorm, featuring some of the best tube riders in the world, breaking down five tubular scenarios in the hopes that someday, after reading and digesting these words, you will pull-in and shoot out of your next tube ride.

Reef Heazlewood shows sublime form in the tube, hands guiding his path and speed.

TAMING THE ALMOND

An almond-shaped barrel is basically a tube that isn't round but more of an oval. This type of tube breaks top-to-middle instead of top-to-bottom. Not a threatening kind of tube, generally speaking, but also a great primer to learning how to ride barrels when they get rounder and wider.

"I call almond barrels 'Cali barrels'," confesses Alan Cleland Jr., who was born and bred in the thumping tubes of Mainland Mexico and has grown up to be one of the best tube riders of the new generation.

Cleland is well-versed in almond tubes. "I stand a little bit further up on my board than I would in a round barrel," he explains. "You've got to get small in this type of tube. Unlike a wide barrel, you can't really pump that much in almond barrels."

According to Alan, when you pull into an almond-shaped tube, it's more often than not a quick tuck-in right off the take-off or a mid-faced bottom-turn type of entry. Whether you're riding frontside or backside, you're going to be riding high, or you're going to get clipped.

"I'm watching the lip line in this type of tube," says Cleland. "I am looking at where the barrel is starting to break—looking up and out. A lot of times, when you come out of an almond barrel, you're actually going up the face of the wave and out of the tube higher than you think. I think two crucial parts of successfully riding almond-shaped barrels is watching the lip line and staying high in the tube."

> "I PUT MYSELF AS DEEP AS I CAN."

Shane Dorian is a legendary tube rider, and his take on the almond variety offers us a mathematical approach. "If you can imagine, essentially, an almond-shaped barrel is an oval," he says. "The barrel itself is at an angle, so your body needs to match that angle. Look at Jack Robinson: when he's surfing this type of barrel, he's high on the face of the wave, and his body is in almost a triangular position."

Dorian continues, "Triangles don't really go well in perfect circles, but it's the exact shape that fits in an oval. When the tube is top-to-middle, the angle of your body is critical, as is where you are on the wave. Get as high up the face of the wave as you can without getting lipped, and get yourself into a sort of triangle or diamond shape to fit the tube. If you're riding low on the face in an almond barrel, you're probably gonna get lipped."

Anthony Walsh is one of the most-tubed surfers on the planet. When he talks tubes, we listen. "You can't go too deep in almond-shaped barrels," he says. "I look at where the lip is starting to throw. That's the area that tells me where to be. You want to be up and in the pocket, and always have your eye on the escape—almond tubes tend to pinch more than round tubes."

"I try to avoid almond tubes," says tube hound Dean Morrison. "I'd rather do a big turn on waves like that. But, if I do pull into an almond-shaped barrel, it's all about being high and tight and keeping your shoulders in. You have to put your weight on that inside rail and keep your vision towards that upper corner of the tube—out of the tube and up a little bit. If you look down in one of these things, you're probably gonna get clipped."

THE ROLL-IN

For most surfers, the roll-in-type tube is the dream scenario. The phrase "catch a wave and you're sitting on top of the world" comes to mind when thinking about roll-ins. The Beach Boys were onto something when they said that because roll-ins are the ultimate when it comes to tube-riding setups. This is the scenario where you have the most time to think and react, which can be good or bad.

"Roll-ins are the best," Shane Dorian says with a smile. "Obviously, there are a million ways to roll in, and they're all different. But, when I'm in the position of surfing a roll-in, I like to try to draw my line out into the flats to really be able to see what is unfolding on the wave. Plus, the further you go into the flats, the more speed you're washing off and the deeper you're going to be," Shane observes.

"Speed control is key in this situation," he adds. "Too slow or too much of a stall, and the wave steamrolls you. Too fast or not enough of a stall, and you don't get barrelled."

In looking at footage of Dorian on roll-in style waves, we often see a mellow drawn-out drop-in with a subtle "check stall" near the bottom of the wave. It's all smooth, and he's not engaging any harsh angles. Subtly is the call for roll-in tubes.

"If you try to stall on a roll-in, it can be really difficult to slow yourself down enough. That's why I like the ride out into the flats, because you're letting the wave and your angle toward the beach do the stall for you," Shane says.

"I also like to scoot up on my board rather than stomping the tail on roll-ins," Dorian explains before sharing another great tip. "The biggest thing that people, who don't have a lot of experience in tubes do is stand too far back on the tail of their board. If you watch Slater, Robbo, Bruce Irons, or Medina, you'll see that they all widen their stance when they are about to pull-in on roll-in-style waves. Widen your stance, stabilise yourself, and begin to slightly lean forward as you see the tube starting to form. All the best tube riders in the world are leaning more forward than you might think."

"Rolling-in is really about 'feel' and what you see," says Dean. "You want to be as deep as you can while seeing the exit. You should be looking as far down the line as possible to try to read what the wave is going to do. Roll-in tubes feel so good—full-on time warp, and it feels like slow motion. I still remember my first roll-in."

"When I'm on a roll-in, I put myself as deep as I can," says Walsh. "Get in nice and slow and speed up from there. Roll-ins allow you to get in early and draw out that bottom turn to burn speed. I'm pretty far forward on my board in these situations. My back foot is over the front two fins. I'm rarely even standing on my tail pad in bigger barrels."

Reef Heazlewood, matching
the almond angle.

Ethan Ewing keeps an eye out for the doggy door.

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I'M IN THE TUBE; NOW WHAT?

“The biggest element to riding tubes *well* is trust,” answers Dorian. “Trusting that the tube is going to let you out is huge. I see a lot of friends of mine pull-in and panic. We all have trust issues in the barrel, but getting over that will help your strike rate so much. Try to stay relaxed. Don’t panic; draw your line, and trust you’re gonna ride the barrel. Nothing is more heartbreaking than riding a tube towards the exit and having that freak-out moment, where you jump off your board or straighten out for no reason. Trust your skills when in the tube.”

All of the surfers we talked to agree that keeping your shoulders square and facing your chest towards the exit of the tube is paramount in actually making it out of the tube.

“A lot of people lower their heads while they’re in the barrel, which is wrong,” says Shane. “The best tube riders have their heads up, and they are more often than not leaning up and into the barrel. Frontside or backside, keep your head up, keep your eyes open, and keep that forward momentum going.”

“I use my hands to guide me through barrels,” says Alan Cleland. “Backside or frontside, I always like to have my hands on the face of the wave. I’m not grabbing the water, just kind of sliding my hand along the wall of the wave and feeling the curve. Your hands can help guide you out of the tube as well. It sometimes feels like you’re pulling on an invisible rope, pulling yourself out of the tube.”

> “I CALL IT THE GUILLOTINE.”

Commitment is key to coming out of barrels. Shane Dorian talks about “trust” in the tube, and trust equals commitment. You have to be committed to the tube. That’s the only way you’re going to make it in and out.

“When you hesitate, you get in trouble,” Cleland says. “Commitment is crucial to being a good tube rider.”

“When I’m in bigger barrels, the deeper I am, the more I look at where the lip is exploding,” says Walsh. “I’m looking down towards the bottom when the wave is exploding, to really gauge how long I’m going to be able to stay in the tube.”

EXITING THE DOGGY DOOR

To the best of our knowledge, “doggy door” is unique to surfing’s vernacular when used as a verb. If you don’t know what a doggy-door exit is, it’s when a surfer is in the tube, and the wave starts to close out around them. The only way out is straight out the front of the tube instead of out through the side of an open-ended tube.

Contrary to what many believe, the doggy-door exit is best performed when the rider has the space and time to do a little pump up the face inside the tube, giving them a little speed burst to go straight out the closing section. You will probably get smashed if you go down the line and attempt to do a hard turn out of the barrel without that little pump.

“I call it the guillotine,” Alan Cleland says smiling. “It all happened really fast, but at the same time in slow motion. This is a technique you can actually work on, and it does take a lot of practice. Basically, when you see the tube starting to close and the doggy door open, you do a little pump up the face, and then, angle your turn straight toward the beach. You need to use the wave to get the speed burst it takes to outrun the lip that’s chasing you.”

“I almost think of it as a little ollie,” Shane responds when asked about the doggy door. “The harder you turn, the slower you get out the barrel and the more chance you have of getting lipped. When you identify the doggy door, as you’re straightening out, it’s almost like you’re doing a mini ollie—a way [to] lift yourself out of the danger zone. Keep the angle subtle and straight toward the beach. You’re gonna get slammed a lot trying to get out of the doggy door, but that’s normal, and yes, it is dangerous at times. It’s all about speed and the angle you take. You’re trying to outrun the lip and get as far out in the flats in front of the wave without going too far, which can result in burning too much speed and getting smashed from behind.”

“For me, the key to a good doggy-door exit is using the wave to give you the speed to come straight out before the lip,” Anthony Walsh explains. “Just before I attempt the doggy-door exit, I ride up the face of the wave and pump off the wave straight out the door. If you try a hard cut while riding low on the wave, you’re done. Get high in the tube, and use the momentum of it—have to get that speed burst, and make your escape.”

DEALING WITH THE FOAM BALL

Most surfers won’t know what it’s like to deal with a foam ball as these wild beasts only show themselves in real proper tubes. But if you are tussling with a foam ball, our panel has some tips. “I’ve been working on this one a lot lately,” says Cleland. “It’s tricky, but when you’re really deep in a tube, and you start to feel that foam ball creeping up on you, keep your knees bent and ready to absorb the power of the foam ball. I like to keep my weight back a little bit, not enough to be stalling, but just to keep the fins engaged while still sort of on top of the foam ball.”

“Keeping your stance wide, your centre of gravity low, and your knees nice and bent will help tame the foam ball,” replies Shane. “A lot of time, the foam ball is trying to shoot up underneath our board, so if you’re ready for it and centred on your board, you’ll have a better chance at riding in front of and, or, slightly above the foam ball.”

Board choice can help as well. “Ride a quad,” suggests Walsh. “Quads are a game changer when it comes to surviving the foam ball. In my opinion and experience, you can ride deeper on a quad, and the pair of side fins actually helps stabilize you and push you forward instead of side to side. Staying loose while solid on your feet is super important. You’re not going to overpower a foam ball, so work with it, not against it.”

“Surfers have been trying to tame the foam ball for years,” muses Morrison. “I like to keep [my] back knee in, pointed towards the exit of the tube, while putting my weight on the inside rail. It’s almost like you’re riding on the upper edge of the foam ball and trying to avoid being right in the middle of it.”

Lennix Smith negotiates
the wild foam-ball beast.

Soli Bailey charges into a solid keg.

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GET ME OUT OF HERE (SAFELY)

Tubes are scary, and no matter how good you are or where you're surfing, lots of injuries happen inside the spinning vortex. Obviously, you need reps if you want to get better at tube riding, but with these reps will come many wipeouts. Sometimes, it's up to the wave gods to thrash you inside the tube, but there are ways to mitigate the beatings and hopefully practise your tube riding without getting injured.

"I tend to jump forward using the pin-drop technique," says Walsh. "Always forward, never backward. When you fall backwards and shoot your board forward, you are really out of control, and you've just put yourself in the worst, most-unpredictable part of the wave. This is where you can get sucked over and really smashed. The trick is to penetrate the water and get away from your board. Depending on how shallow the waves are and all that, of course, you have to know when to pin drop and when to just ride straight into oblivion."

"We all bail sometimes." Dean grins and adds, "I usually try to just ride it out as far as I can, especially in shallow reefs. When it's shallow, I try to stay as loose as possible and ride the wave as far as I can. If it's a really shallow situation and a smaller wave, I kick the board out away from me and kind of try to fall flat in the trough of the wave."

"Getting worked is the only way to learn," Dorian says while laughing. "The world inside the tube is insane. It's slow motion but split second at the same time. If the wave is closing out, I try to turn hard off the bottom and just push as hard as I can through the wave and out the back. Of course, on bigger barrels, this is how you get sucked over, so you have to be smart about it. Like I said earlier, it's about confidence and commitment. Pull in and stay in there. You may surprise yourself [with] how long you can stay in the tube. That being said, whatever you do, never dive head first towards the beach. That's the most dangerous thing you can do in surfing. If you know you're about to get destroyed, do your best to stay relaxed in [your] mind and body. Take a deep breath, cover your head if you have to, but don't spaz or panic. That's another way to get hurt."

> "WE ALL HAVE TRUST ISSUES IN THE BARREL."

FIVE QUICK TIPS:

"Keep your chin over your front knee when in the 'pig dog' backside barrel stance. Your chin is out, chest up and facing out of the barrel, and your weight is evenly distributed."—Alan Cleland Jr.

"Touching the face of the wave helps a lot in any type of barrel. Use your hands to guide you in and out of the barrel."—Shane Dorian

"When you're pulling in backside and grabbing your rail, slide your hand back towards the fins. That will help you stay in the proper body position as well as help engage the fins."—Anthony Walsh

"Be mindful of your foot positioning. My back foot is usually way above where my grip is. I like to ride high in the tube and use that zone to project speed moving forward."—Dean Morrison

"Always keep your vision looking out of the tube towards your exit unless it's a big enough tube to look around in and enjoy, which is rare but incredible."—Dean Morrison.

Liam O'Brien with his chin perfectly positioned over his front knee.

Xavier Huxtable, pig dogging through blown Indo glass.

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ASYMMETRIC AUTOCORRECT

Maximum potential with minimal effort

WORDS BY **LEMON HOLLIDAY**

PHOTOS BY **ANDREW SHIELD**

We hate to be the bearer of bad news, but it's time to save for something new: an asymmetrical surfboard. These odd-bods are the underdogs of surfboards that will surprise the greatest cynics. Broken Head, just outside the infamous Byron Bay, has no reception, pumping waves, and heaps of snakes. Three phrases are repeated more than anything else: crystal charging, influencers, and asymmetrical surfboards. Eyes glaze over when someone talks about the first two. However, those seven glorious syllables cause the ears to perk up every time.

Asymms seem like mythical creatures—have there been any recent sightings? At Broken Head, when picture-perfect A-frames glide through the afternoon golden light, misshapen sea creatures and their riders gather.

Among them are Broken Head locals, Hugo Winchester, and his best friend, Ben Hastings. They paddle out into the deep. Winchester pulls onto a wave. It peels over his head in a brilliant blue. The barrel spits as Hugo shoots out.

Ben sneaks into another ethereal aqua peeler. Flying out the barrel, he whirs into a turn. Except it's not exactly a turn; it's more of a slide and spin. It's finless!

Not only can Ben rip, but he shreds on a finless. After his wave, he paddles over, and we chat about his board. It's the weirdest thing. The tail looks like a shark has chomped the back right side of his board. Then, instead of replacing it, Ben's sanded it smooth and had it re-glassed. The shape is mesmerising.

Kerzy and his asymmetrical quad—the kind of airborne virus you want!

ALBUM

We continue the discussion over a few beers. In Year 12, Hastings was a booger. But he quickly transitioned (rightfully so) to a thruster.

"When I was 20, I was getting really bored with surfing. Actually, it was almost like a chore," Ben says with a heavy sigh. His face lifts as he continues, "Then I saw a video of Krooky riding it [an asymm], and I was like, *Oh my God. What is this?* and went down the biggest rabbit hole."

We'll pause there because if you don't know Ari "Krooky" Browne yet, you'll need to look up the surfing wizard who happens to ride finless asymms exclusively. Specifically, the Rabbit's Foot shaped by Ryan Lovelace in California. Krooky is unarguably the most comedic entry point to finless asymms, but somehow at the same time, one of the best out there. Guess where Krookie lives? Byron! As we mentioned, "asymm" is the third most-popular word around the Shire. Okay, back to the story.

Diving deeper into the asymm portal, Ben describes how he studied Lovelace's shapes in detail and decided the Rabbit's Foot with its near spaceship-looking design would be perfect for experimentation. Ben finds a local shaper, describes what he's after, and twelve months later, it arrives.

"As soon as I got a proper asymm, I was kicking myself that I didn't get one sooner," Ben explains. "Getting on the asymm, feels like I'm opening up a whole new world of surfing, and I want to experiment with it."

When an asymmetrical board is broken down to its simplest definition, "logical boards" would be a more appropriate name. Donald Brink, a renowned South African shaper living in California, says his boards are "helping you to surf the way you stand".

Apart from our goofy or natural stance, don't we stand the same? Two feet stuck to a waxed surface. Well, no—our toes are much more flexible than our heels, making it quite challenging to turn on our backhand rather than our forehand. We use the rest of our bodies to compensate instead of letting our boards do the work for us.

"ASYMMETRICAL DESIGNS ACT LIKE AUTOCORRECT."

Asymmetrical designs act like autocorrect for our form and learnt technique. The boards react to where we want to go, and move the water for us. The best asymms will fill in for us where our ability reaches its max, providing that extra control, stability, or turning radius that we can't imagine performing ourselves.

Now before anyone rings their closest asymm shaper to put their board order in the (very, very, very) long queue, we'll want to know a bit more about what we want in our designs. Asymmetrical boards are as intimate and customised as they come. As much as we don't want to admit our faults and flaws, our asymmetrical board shaper should not only know them but embrace them and fill in the gaps in their design.

PSA please don't go whingeing to your local shaper about your biggest insecurities. That's why we have therapists and best friends. However, telling shapers those little weak spots in our technique could drastically change the result of our boards. They are helping us find the yin to our yang. The Ishka to our Torren, if you will.

Examining the asymm's underbelly: when (part) quad-set meets twin-fin, it makes an expensive and tricky setup.

Asymms perform at their best when the shaper and the surfer are entirely in sync. Ross Wilson, a shaper on the Sunshine Coast, teamed up with brother-sister duo Archi and Luca Doble to create designs rarely left at home. While Luca enjoyed dabbling with the asymms they made, she tells me that Archi rode those boards to their grave.

"The only reason he [Archi] stopped riding his," Luca recalls, "was that it was black, and he surfed it so long that one day the resin delaminated into the foam. Otherwise, he'd still have it."

Finding a shaper you trust, who knows your style, and has a great deal of understanding about asymms, could be your key to more control while in the water. Because the boards are tailor-made to your style and form, you'll want a shorter heel-side rail to compensate for that flexibility issue. This design makes the board much easier to turn and manoeuvre on your backhand, giving our surfing a more-balanced feeling.

French-Australian, Tom Morat, began his asymm journey under the supervision of asymm pioneer Ryan Burch. After arriving in California, he quickly found himself on one of Burch's boards, which he rode into the ground.

"I never felt anything as lively or tuned in until I felt Burch's boards," Morat admits. "He takes the time to make sure all of his boards are amazing."

Not everyone can be as lucky as this Noosa-based surfer who learnt from the world's best. So where should a newbie start?

"If someone asked me, I'd tell them to try and shape one themself if they get the opportunity," Morat says. "Shape yourself some boards and try not to just jump on a computer and print an asymm. You don't even have to make it symmetrical."

Rachel Lord is doing just that. She is currently shaping a 6'5" Reverse Cowgirl for herself. (No, I'm not taking the piss.) Lord is stepping away from her traditional log shaping and riding to bring a new design to life. As both the surfer and shaper, she knows precisely what she wants to feel while on the wave and how to achieve it through the contour and curves of her board. Who said shapers weren't physicists?

> "THERE'S NO INNOVATION WITHOUT EXPERIMENTATION."

Photos of the design show one side is a single fin with a pronged nose, and the other side is an asymm-fish kind of thing with half-quad half-twin. Where the heck did that shape emerge from?

Rachel confesses that she accidentally flipped the blank, making the rocker a bit off. After looking at the abnormal blank for a while, she saw the possibility of an asymm shape.

"I had so many things I wanted to try," Lord explains, "and I figured I'd put them all in one board."

There's no innovation without experimentation, right?

If you'd prefer to remain out of the shaping bay (where it's always offshore), your next best step is to track down a shaper. If you're lucky enough, you may meet them in the water. Just like Sam Lopert, Inner Relm co-founder, and Jarryd Watson of Ocean Street Shapes. The duo have worked together to shape and test all kinds of asymmetrical boards over the past four and a half years after a chance run in at their local break.

Bryce Young, an asymm aficionado for many a year.

"The first thing I liked was the speed and flow on my toe side," Lopert said as he recalled his discoveries with the new shapes. "Then, on my heel, I realised I had that same feeling—speed and flow. It was a balance I'd never felt before. The perfect ratio of cruisy to performance."

Ironic, isn't it? A board with perfect symmetry requires our bodies to work harder to compensate for our asymmetrical weight. Yet, once we lose that symmetry and rely on the power of design and a shaper's intuition, *Viola!* We wind up with a board that unlocks maximum potential with minimal effort.

At the end of the day, asymms are for innovation, experimentation, and progression. So why do we only see them in small pockets and cliques of surfing culture?

Lopart speculates three critical hesitations for an asymm, which we'll dismantle.

Number One: Cash. Good boards aren't cheap and cheap boards aren't good. With asymms, we have to trust our shaper and hope they know best. Since there is a wide variety of asymms (see Ryan Burch, Carl Ekstrom, or Ryan Lovelace), a log and a thruster will vary significantly in price, just like a symmetrical board.

> "EXPLOSIVE RESULTS AND MOVEMENTS YOU'VE NEVER FELT BEFORE."

Number Two: The risk factor is high—we can't test it halfway and tweak it. But we're investing, stepping out and trusting for a radical change in how we surf, hopefully for the better.

Number Three: Learning curve. Think back to the first time we stood up on our boards compared to now. Each time we rode our symmetrical boards, we trained our brains to adjust for that unevenness (a.k.a. kooking it) we initially felt. Muscle memory brings us to our now perfect form—wink, wink. If we throw off that balance just slightly with an asymmetrical board, we have to retrain our brains to master those new dimensions, including the way the board now turns and holds in the wave.

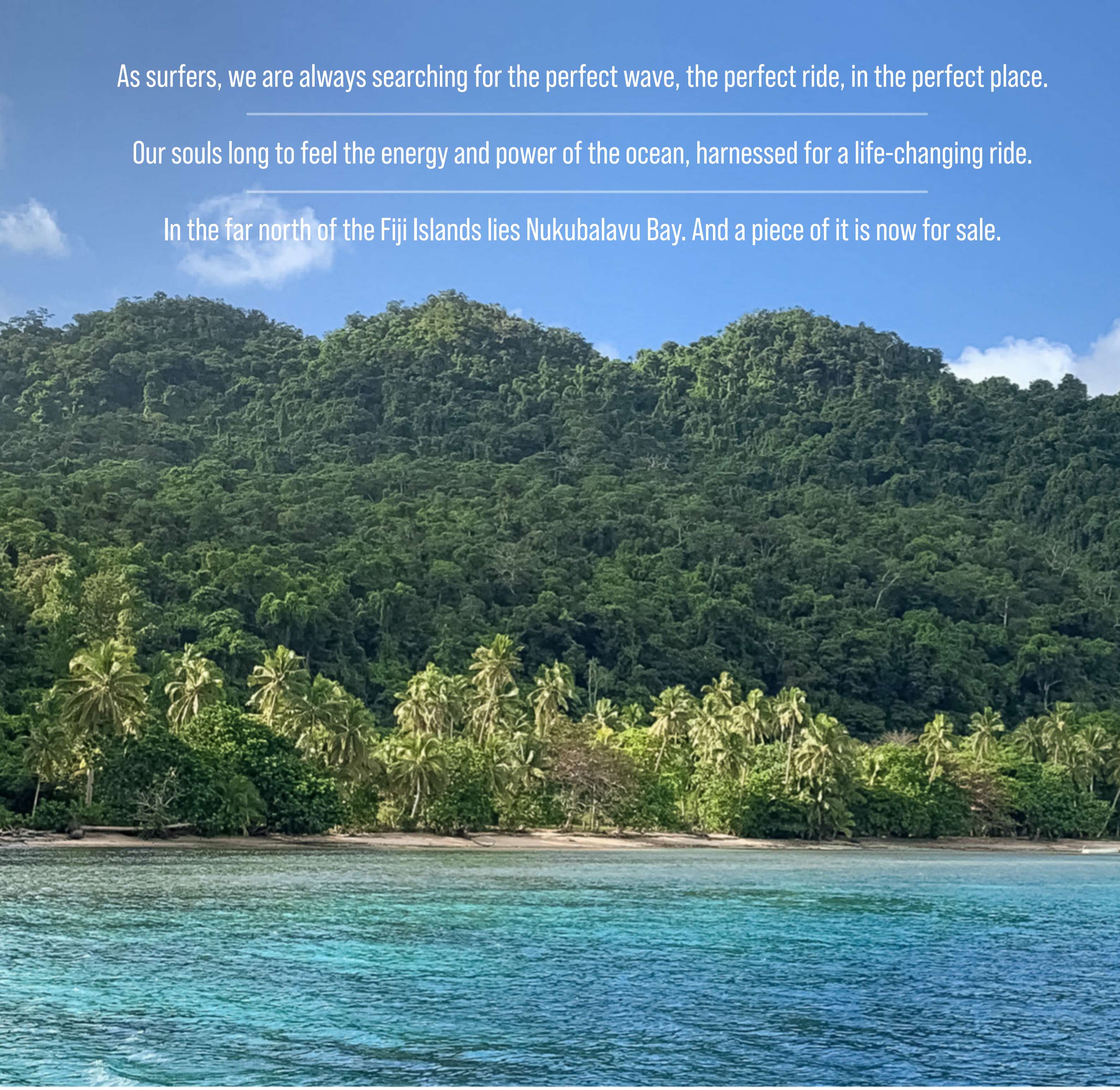
Those three thoughts could easily make us turn the page and forget about it. If you've read this far, you probably have an inkling that this is the next board you want in your quiver to step up your surfing.

Once you get past those slight obstacles, you'll see "explosive results and movements you've never felt before", as Lopert put it. Many confess they'll never go back to a symmetrical board and have ridden their irregular-shaped sleds until they're at breaking point. Like Ben, who has decided it's time to retire his Rabbit's Foot and order another board. He's going to his shaper with ideas to improve, tweak, and continue the experiment that we call asymmetrical surfboards. So take this as your sign (we know, very Byron Shireling-like) to dive into the asymmetrical world.

Bryce Young proves that asymmetrical surfboards are about creating—not finding—balance.

BOARDS: **ASYMMETRIC AUTOCORRECT**

Matt Wilkinson tests an asymmetrical board in the Maldives during a *Surfing Life* Board Bible.



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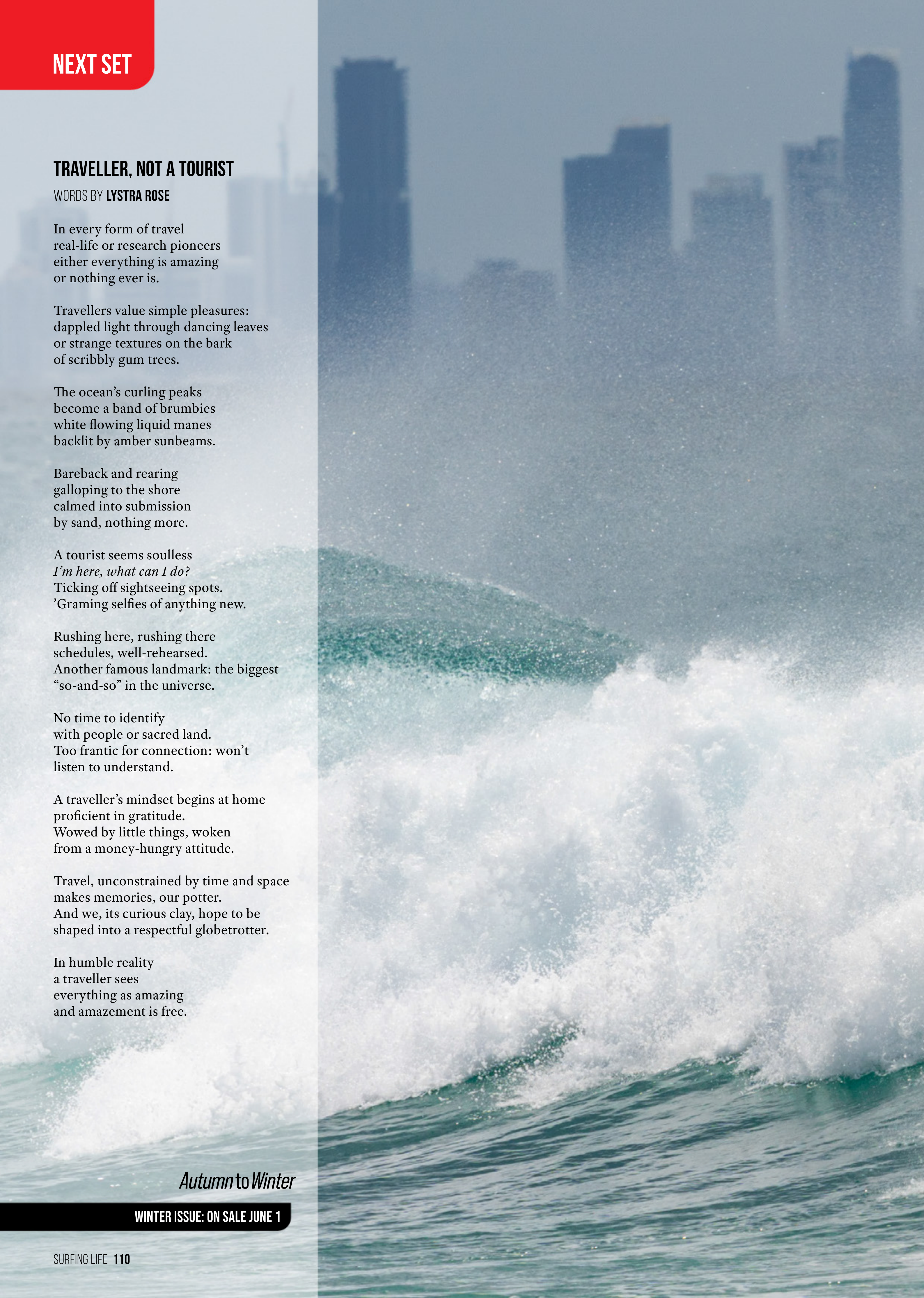


TRAVELLER, NOT A TOURIST

WORDS BY **LYSTRA ROSE**

In every form of travel
real-life or research pioneers
either everything is amazing
or nothing ever is.

Travellers value simple pleasures:
dappled light through dancing leaves
or strange textures on the bark
of scribbly gum trees.

The ocean's curling peaks
become a band of brumbies
white flowing liquid manes
backlit by amber sunbeams.

Bareback and rearing
galloping to the shore
calmed into submission
by sand, nothing more.

A tourist seems soulless
I'm here, what can I do?
Ticking off sightseeing spots.
'Graming selfies of anything new.

Rushing here, rushing there
schedules, well-rehearsed.
Another famous landmark: the biggest
"so-and-so" in the universe.

No time to identify
with people or sacred land.
Too frantic for connection: won't
listen to understand.

A traveller's mindset begins at home
proficient in gratitude.
Wowed by little things, woken
from a money-hungry attitude.

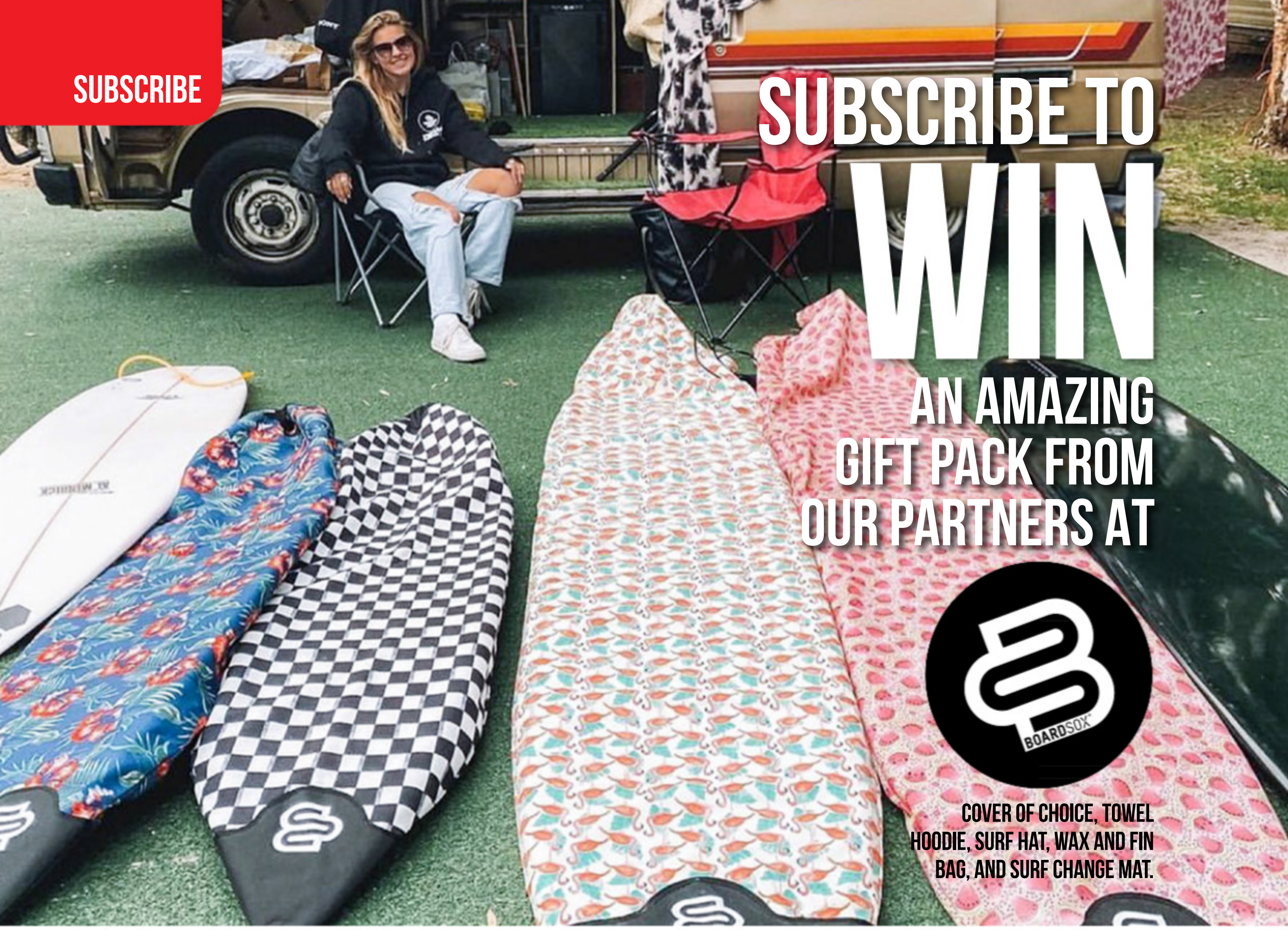
Travel, unconstrained by time and space
makes memories, our potter.
And we, its curious clay, hope to be
shaped into a respectful globetrotter.

In humble reality
a traveller sees
everything as amazing
and amazement is free.

Autumn to Winter

WINTER ISSUE: ON SALE JUNE 1

SURFER: **JACK ROBINSON**
PHOTO: **SHIELD**



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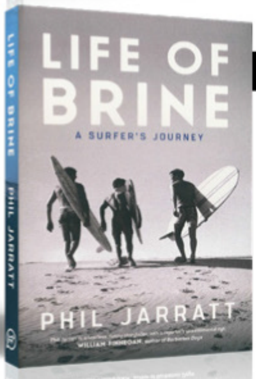
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A SURFER'S JOURNEY
PHIL JARRATT

LIFE OF BRINE

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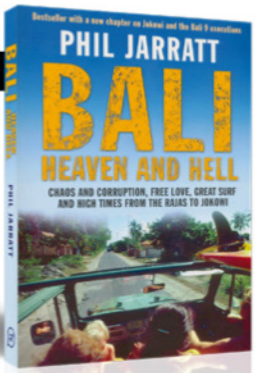
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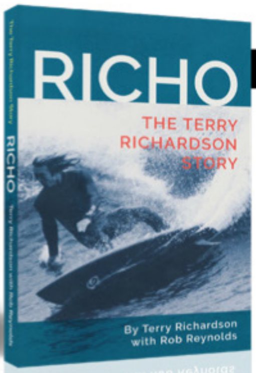
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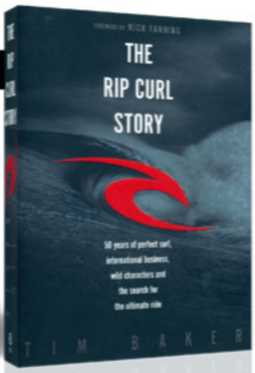
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